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LETTERS

To the AUTHOR of a Soame &c.

FREE ENQUIRY

INTO THE

Nature and Origin of Evil.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

THREE DISCOURSES.

I. On CONSCIENCE.
II. On INSPIRATION.
III. On a PARADISIACAL STATE.

By the Rev. R. Shepherd,
FELLOW OF C. C. C. OXFORD.

Εχοντες ουν την αιτιαν του κακου, λαμπρα φωνη βοωμεν, οτι ο Θεος κακιας αναιτιος, διοτι το κακον η ψυχη ενεργει αυτεξουσιως, και ουκ ο Θεος; ει μεν γαρ βια το κακον επραττεν η ψυχη, ταχα αν τις τον Θεον ητιασατο τον αναιτιως αυτην συγχωρησαντα βιασθηναι, και τοι ουδε κακον ην το βια πραττομενον· κατα δε προαιρεσιν αυτο αιρουμενη αυτη αν αιτια λεγοιτο δικαιως. Simp. Comm. in Epict.

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and S. Parker, in *Oxford*. 1768.

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PREFACE.

*LITTLE did the author of the following remarks on "A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil," when he firſt offered them to the public, apprehend the ſeverity of the Enquirer's reſentment. He preſumed on the ſame right to appeal to the world for the propriety of his obſervations on that performance, that the Enquirer had to offer it to the public. And if ſuch daring diſſent from his opinions aroſe, as is pretended**, from ſenſeleſs miſapprehenſions, *or* malicious miſconſtructions; *it were folly to put himſelf*

* See additional preface to the Free Enquiry, &c. page 2.

in a paſſion about a malignant critic, and cruelty to inſult and abuſe an ignorant one.

But with whatever degree of ignorance the following pages are chargeable, the author takes the opportunity this re-publication offers, of aſſuring the Enquirer, he had no malice in his intentions: he read the FREE ENQUIRY *without the leaſt knowledge of the author, with a mind abſolutely uninfluenced by prejudice or partiality. His was unhappily one of* * thoſe middle-ſized underſtandings to which the Enquirer meaned not to write: *the doctrine of the original of evil, as revealed in ſcripture, appeared to him more conſonant to reaſon, and more conſiſtent with the attributes of God, than any other ſcheme human ingenuity had ſuggeſted, even the plauſible ſolution urged by the* Free Enquirer.

* Free Enquiry preface, page 23.

Of

Of ſuch his diſſent from the acute author of the Enquiry *he ventured to produce his reaſons; and to treat his* Enquiry *with the ſame freedom, the* Enquirer *had thought fit to treat the authority of inſpiration, the doctrines of redemption, ſatisfaction,* &c. *Irritated by ſuch preſumption, the* Enquirer *in a ſubſequent edition of his work, ſupports his former opinions by bold aſſertions and coarſe words; ſtigmatiſes all ſuch, as ſhall have the audacity to diſſent from him, with the polite terms of ſenſeleſs and malicious bigots* *.

Unawed by the ſeverity of theſe reflections, and unconvinced by ſuch arguments as thoſe, in further illuſtration and ſupport of what was in that little tract advanced againſt the Free Enquiry, *the author has in this re-publication annexed to it three*

* Free Enquiry preface, page 2, 30.

diſcourſes; *or, to adopt the* Enquirer's *elegant terſeneſs of phraſe, three* ready-made pulpit harangues: *which, otherwiſe conſidered, no preſumption of their merit would have induced him to obtrude on the public. They are publiſhed in the exact form in which they were preached; and as they were never intended for the preſs, it is hoped the faults in ſtile and compoſition will be candidly overlooked.*

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

SIR,

IN a late edition of thoſe letters, which gave occaſion to the following remarks; you ſeem to reſent the objections that have been made to them by particulars, and the unfavourable reception they have met with from the public. You ſeem out of humour, becauſe the wild whimſical conjectures and confident aſſertions, that may have been palmed with ſucceſs on a private circle of your admirers, have not paſſed current for arguments with the reaſoning part of the world. You may have adopted a ſyſtem, have been pleaſed with it; and from thence prejudiced in its favour: with a paternal eye you

you may have overlooked all its defects; and perſonal eſteem, or deference to your judgment, may incline partial friendſhip to do the ſame. But if you appeal to the public, it requires not * that ſingular acquaintance with the imperfection of human nature, of which you ſeem to boaſt yourſelf, to ſuppoſe the public will deal more freely with you. And when, piqued at the liberties they take in diſſenting from you, you talk of the † *ſenſeleſs miſapprehenſions, and malicious miſconſtructions with which your* Free Enquiry *hath been tortured*: when you tell us, *the united force of ignorance and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthuſiaſm*, have conſpired againſt you; need you be informed that railing and abuſe add no weight to a flimſy argument, nor will ever eſtabliſh the truth of a fact, where the powers of reaſon fail?

Your preface conſiſts of a recapitulation of what is advanced in your letters; you

* See preface to the Free Enquiry, page 1. & 30.
† See preface, page 30.

have

have taken notice of ſome of the objections that have been made, but have given few of theſe objections their full weight; and have obviated none of them. Indeed it is much eaſier to paſs over an objection in ſilence, than to ſilence it: a ſecret this of which you ſeem to be perfect maſter. Two or three points, however, there are; upon which, ſo cloſely are they connected with the ſubject, I muſt beg to be farther troubleſome. On each I will touch briefly at preſent, thereby making way for a more full diſcuſſion of them in the ſequel.

The doctrine of a primæval ſtate of innocence and happineſs is no point, as ſome have been pleaſed to think, of mere ſpeculation; it forms an eſſential article of chriſtian faith: for if there never was any ſuch ſtate of perfection, there could be no fall from it; and if there was no fall, there was no redemption. However it be; the truth of this notion you apprehend need not be decided here, *becauſe you have not made the leaſt*

mention

mention * *of it.* Give me leave to refer you to your firſt letter; where you tell us, this notion of a *golden age, or paradiſiacal ſtate,* is an *amuſing dream, as abſurd in philoſophy, as in poetry delightful*; and again, that *theſe enchanting ſcenes could in fact never have exiſted,* &c. Now to prove the probability, or even poſſibility, of ſuch a ſtate having exiſted, will greatly contribute to the demolition of that pretty fabric you have erected: ſince if there ever was ſuch a ſtate, that is, if the nature of man will admit of ſuch a ſtate, what hinders but that ſuch a ſtate might have continued? whereas your theory proceeds upon a ſuppoſition that it is impoſſible that ſuch a ſtate ſhould ever have exiſted, and entirely reſts on this hypotheſis.

In anſwer to this ſuppoſition of yours I obſerved that the notion of a primæval ſtate of happineſs and innocence was not peculiar to Chriſtianity; but that it ſeemed to be a traditionary doctrine, common to all nations.

* Preface, page 4.

Not

Not to multiply quotations in proof of the truth of an obſervation, which whoever is the leaſt converſant with the claſſics muſt readily allow; I inſtanced, as with an air of contempt you inſinuate, a ſingle paſſage from Ovid. To which you wittily reply, that Ovid forms no part of your creed. Suppoſe you and I had been diſputing whether there ever was ſuch a perſon as Moſes; and knowing that to a gentleman of your liberal caſt, a quotation from a prophane author would be much more convincing than fifty from what I call divine ones, I had obſerved that Tacitus mentions him as the chief under whoſe conduct the Jews extricated themſelves from the Ægyptian yoke: would you, with an affected air of ſcrupulous chriſtrian zeal, tell me Tacitus formed no part of your creed?

In truth, however willing you may be to ſlur over this doctrine of a paradiſiacal ſtate; it is a matter of ſuch real conſequence, that the falſity of it is the baſis of your ſyſtem; the

the reality of it the ground-work of my religious faith. I have therefore added to the following remarks a diſcourſe on a paradiſiacal ſtate, in which I had endeavoured to prove, that the doctrine of a primæval ſtate of innocence has not only the ſanction of ſcripture, but was a received opinion among the Ægyptians, and adopted by the Greeks and Romans: and alſo that ſuch a notion is moſt conſiſtent with reaſon, moſt agreeable to the attributes of God, and to the nature of man. It is an opinion, in which for my own part I ſo firmly believe; that though at leaſt as ſincere a Chriſtian as yourſelf, I willingly let Ovid contribute his mite *to form an article of my creed.*

As to divine inſpiration, you think it a very great doubt, "whether any one can poſſibly know when he himſelf is inſpired:" and "that he ſhould ever produce indubitable credentials of his divine commiſſion to others who are uninſpired, ſeems to you to be utterly impracticable; there being no marks by

by which the fact can be aſcertained, nor any faculties in the human mind, which are able to diſtinguiſh it. In anſwer to this is added a ſecond diſcourſe on inſpiration: in which I obſerve it implies no contradiction, to ſuppoſe that God can inſtantaneouſly enlarge the faculties of the human mind, whenever he ſees good; that ſuch inſtantaneous enlargement of the intellectual faculties may be very well ſuppoſed perceptible by the perſon himſelf on whom ſuch effect is wrought, and that ſuch perception is to himſelf ſufficient conviction of his inſpiration; and I have alſo endeavoured to ſhew, that certain criteria may be eſtabliſhed, by which real inſpiration will be ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed from all falſe pretences to it.

However, notwithſtanding your denial of a primæval ſtate of innocence, your doubt about the reality of inſpiration, your abſolute belief of the impracticability of communicating a knowledge of our own inſpiration to others who are uninſpired, you profeſs yourſelf

yourſelf a thorough ſound chriſtian, nay a Champion of Chriſtianity; and declare that the Motive of your admired Performance was to ſhew the Excellence and Credibility of the Chriſtian Religion. Such Aſſiſtance the Chriſtian Religion wants not; and ſuch paultry Efforts, to ſap its Foundation, deſpiſes.

When you affirm, "it is impoſſible for Omnipotence itſelf to give a perfect Government, or a perfect Religion, to an imperfect Creature:" your aſſertion can only be ſupported by a mere Quibble upon Terms. By a *perfect* Government or Religion, you mean *abſolute Perfection*, a Government or Religion calculated for the firſt Order of created Beings: by an *imperfect* Creature, you mean *comparative Imperfection*, an Order of Beings in their Nature leſs perfect than thoſe. But if by a perfect Government or Religion, you mean no more than ſuch an one, as ſhall be moſt expedient for the purpoſes of that Set of Beings for whoſe Uſe they

they were inſtituted; I ſee no reaſon why Perfection may not be aſcribed both to the one and the other. Man for inſtance ſeems formed by Nature a ſociable and religious Animal. If he be in his own Nature as perfect as other Creatures are, we muſt conclude; as his Nature required him to conduct himſelf according to Rules of Government and Laws of Religion, that thoſe Rules of Polity preſcribed by the benevolent Creator, and thoſe Laws of Religion, were properly adapted to the Nature of his Being, and if exactly obſerved, calculated and ſufficient to make him happy. In order to which he muſt of neceſſity be furniſhed by the ſame benevolent Author of his Exiſtence with a perfect comprehenſion of theſe Laws, and an ability of conducting himſelf according to them. A principle deeply implanted in the human Mind, thus illuminating and energetic, we may apprehend Conſcience originally to have been. This and Reaſon we may pronounce to have been

been abundantly ſufficient to direct mankind, both as to religion and polity, in the perfect paths of happineſs and peace. Of this to explain my opinion more at large, I have annexed a diſcourſe on the ſubject, and will therefore not trouble you with unneceſſary repetitions here.

What is truth? on a certain occaſion ſaid the ſcoffing Pilate. With an equal degree of ſarcaſm you aſk, "what was that faith, which the author of the chriſtian religion indiſpenſably required in all his diſciples?" It will perhaps be a ſufficient anſwer to your queſtion, to inform you what it was not. It was not then a bare belief in the being of a God, for this will not diſtinguiſh the chriſtian from a reaſoning heathen. It was not a belief that the ſole end and aim of Chriſt's divine miſſion was, to leave us precepts and an example to walk by; for that puts Chriſt upon no better foot than a Socrates, a Plato, an Epictetus, or Theognis. Nay ſuch a faith ſuppoſes him a leſs amiable perſon, a much

much inferior character to any of theſe, in that it repreſents him as an impoſtor; for he tells us by his apoſtles, that he *came to take away the ſins of the world by giving his life a ranſom for many.*—That, *as in Adam all died, even ſo in Chriſt ſhould all be made alive.* To theſe many paſſages might be added, that plainly mark out Chriſt's ſatisfaction, and the redemption of mankind.

You inform us however, the ſatisfaction of Chriſt means no more than this; that he by his excellent precepts communicated much happineſs to mankind; and, as according to your hypotheſis Omnipotence cannot impart to mankind a grain of happineſs without a proportionate quantity of miſery, that in conſequence of this happineſs he in his own death and ſufferings took upon him the portion of miſery that muſt neceſſarily attend it. If I aſk you, why happineſs and miſery are in ſuch proportions weighed out as it were by drachms and ounces; that

God cannot communicate an ounce of happineſs, without charging his favour with half an ounce of miſery: you have your anſwer ready; you fancy that it is ſo. Hence the doctrine of vicarious puniſhment, ſacrifices, &c. and hence the key to the Origin of Evil.

Before I conclude this letter, I muſt beg leave to detain you one minute longer on the doctrine of vicarious puniſhment; which you obſerve is upon any other plan than your own, of all religious tenets the moſt abſurd, though the moſt univerſal. "* Pagans, Jews, and Chriſtians have agreed in this one point, though differing in all others; and have all treated it as a ſelf-evident principle, that the ſins of one creature might be attoned for by the ſufferings of another: but from whence they have derived this ſtrange opinion, *none of them have pretended to give any account.*" And are you really ignorant

* Nature and Origin of Evil, p. 148.

of

of any reaſon being aſſigned for a practice ſo univerſally conformed to? If ſo, you muſt permit me to refer you to ſome of thoſe ſyſtematical divines, whom you ſeem to treat with ſuch an air of contempt; for either your ignorance in this point is affected, or you have never read thoſe ſyſtems you pretend to cenſure and deſpiſe. This conformity confeſſedly ſo univerſal, to a practice ſo extravagant, can have no foundation in nature *; yet muſt have ſome cauſe: which though you profeſs yourſelf unable to aſſign, the whole chriſtian œconomy is an explanation of it.

Though the ſcriptures are ſilent as to the inſtitution of ſacrifices, yet we find from the

* Tum vero inſtituta quædam, ita hominibus communia, ut non tam naturæ inſtinctui, aut evidenti rationis collectioni, quam perpetuæ & vix paucis in locis per malitiam aut calamitatem interruptæ traditioni, accepta referri debeant: qualis victimarum in ſacris mactatio, &c. GROT. de Ver.

the oblations of Cain and Abel, it muſt have been in the days of Adam: eſtabliſhed, as it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, by divine revelation, and the obſervance of it enjoined by a poſitive command of God. And very great ſtreſs was undoubtedly laid upon it, or a practice ſo little to be accounted for on principles of reaſon could never have been by after ages ſo univerſally received. The ſcriptural explication of this matter, to compriſe it in as brief terms as poſſible, proceeds thus. Vice is of ſuch a nature, that an infinitely pure God muſt abhor it; what he hates infinite juſtice obliges him to puniſh: yet mercy and goodneſs, attributes as inſeparable from our ideas of the Deity as either of the other, incline him to will, that all mankind ſhould he ſaved. His wiſdom diſcovers an expedient, which ſhall reconcile to each other his juſtice and mercy; and place ſinful man's corrupted race in a capability of happineſs. A divine perſon devotes himſelf as an expiatory ſacrifice, oblation,

lation, and ſatisfaction for the ſins of the whole world: *by whoſe ſtripes we are healed.*

Now what could be more efficacious in keeping alive in the mind of man the juſt ſenſe he ought to entertain of the heinous nature of ſin; or what more proper to prepare him for this general expiatory ſacrifice, that was promiſed ever ſince the firſt commiſſion of ſin, and was to be made when the fulneſs of time ſhould come: in ſhort, what more conſiſtent with infinite wiſdom, than this inſtitution of ſacrifices? It was a monition both of the goodneſs of God to mankind, in indulging them with ſuch an expiation; and alſo of the puniſhment in ſtrict juſtice due to ſin, that required ſo great an atonement.

This perhaps you will with your uſual humour ſtile a *ready-made pulpit* harangue. I know not, that is the worſe on that account; and ſure I am, that come from whenceſoever it may, it will in the ſcale of unprejudiced

reaſon weigh much heavier than thoſe dark, unaccountable, unintelligible notions of the neceſſity of partial miſery in order to the production of general happineſs, which you have ſubſtituted in its place.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

THE farther we proceed in the inveſtigation of that very abſtruſe ſubject, the Nature and Origin of Evil; difficulties do ſo riſe on difficulties, that one cannot be ſurpriſed at the many various and whimſical hypotheſes, which have been framed for the ſolution of ſo intricate a point. It is much eaſier to detect the errors of another man's hypotheſis; than, in framing one, to ſteer clear of errors ourſelves. Nor is it ſtrange, that relying ſolely on the powers of unaſſiſted reaſon, in an enquiry ſeemingly above its reach, thoſe in general, who have much conſidered the point, ſhould remain diſſatisfied with every determination except their own. Hence what numerous ſchemes hath human reaſon deviſed to ſolve this gordian knot!

while every one hath been rejected in its turn, and error conſtantly ſucceeded error. For my own part, I cannot but eſteem the ſolution of it, the ſcriptures afford us, fairly and impartially conſidered, to ſtand clearer of objections, and leſs embarraſſed with difficulties, than any other I have yet had the happineſs to light on.

Unſatisfied however with the opinion concerning the Origin of Evil, formed from thence, you ſuppoſe it owing ſolely to the neceſſity of human nature: That is, that evil was ſo intimately interwoven in the frame and conſtitution of man, that he neither was, nor ever could be, abſolutely and entirely free from it*. In order to make

* Much the ſame ſolution of this important queſtion, "Whence is Evil," I find inſinuated in a publication entitled, 'the Morals of the Antients and Moderns compared.' It is abſurd, ſays Mr. England, the author of that treatiſe, to expect a perfect practice from imperfect creatures, &c. &c. In a certain catechiſm, which is ſometimes tacked to the above publication,

way for this ſuppoſition, the firſt grand obſtacle to be removed is, the notion of a primæval ſtate of innocence: which is founded on tradition, hiſtory, and, as many have been induced to think, on reaſon too. For does it not ſavour of abſurdity, is it not irreconcileable with the notions we have of ſpirit and matter, to ſuppoſe that an omnipotent, all-wiſe, all-juſt God ſhould endow a Being with the faculty of reaſon; yet ſubject that divine particle to the arbitrary power and wildneſs of the paſſions: Is not that plainly to ſubject the ſuperior part in human nature to the inferior? For in this degree ſtands man in the chain of nature; a compound Being participating of the different

cation, the reader meets with the following queſtion and anſwer.

Queſt. Whence ariſeth ſin?

Anſw. Sin ariſeth from the neceſſary imperfection of our finite nature.

This, I think, is literally the ſolution inſiſted on by the Free Enquirer: With what ſtrength of reaſoning he ſupports the aſſertion, the following pages will evince.

natures

natures of ſpirit and matter; and thus fills up the vaſt gap that would otherwiſe exiſt between angels and brutes.

Is it not moſt contrary then to reaſon, to ſuppoſe ſuch a being endued with a knowledge of good and evil; convinced of what is right by the higheſt of his faculties, yet neceſſarily determined to what is wrong, and acting under the influence of the meaneſt of them? But let us conſider reaſon, and it is certainly more agreeable to the wiſdom of God, as well as the dignity of man, that we ſhould ſo conſider it, as given him to controul his paſſions, and regulate his deſires; and we ſhall then diſcern a true and noble end in this high prerogative which his benevolent Creator hath veſted in him. If it was not aſſigned him for this uſe, it is impoſſible to find out for what purpoſe it was conferred on him, unleſs to afford him a deeper ſenſe of the unavoidable evil that is ſet before him: and man, the lord of the creation,

creation, will in this point of view appear to be the riddle of it. If it was aſſigned him for this purpoſe and intent; both the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Deity are concerned in its ſufficiency to anſwer the end deſigned, viz. the government of our paſſions. From whence it will appear, that ſin or moral evil, is nothing elſe than an inordinate ſally of the paſſions, owing ſolely to the want of a proper exertion of reaſon; and is a perverſion of that ſubordination which God eſtabliſhed between reaſon and the paſſions. And hence too it follows, that ſome ſpace of time muſt have intervened between the firſt eſtabliſhment of that order and harmony, which ſubſiſted in every part of the creation, when 'God ſaw that all was good,' and the perverſion of it.

Yet this notion of a Paradiſiacal ſtate, or age of innocence, you affirm to be "an amuſing dream, and as abſurd in philoſophy as

" as in poetry delightful *;" which is an affirmation without proof, and by conſequence ſufficiently anſwered by a denial. But " ſuch a ſtate of perfection †, *you* " *think*, might be proved impoſſible, both " from the nature of this terreſtrial globe, " and the nature of its inhabitants." The misfortune is, your conjectures, however ingenious, will never paſs for arguments: nor, till you had ſhewed the impoſſibility of a doctrine, which had hiſtory and tradition in its favour, had you any right to reject it for a fanciful ſuppoſition of your own. And to prove a perfect ſtate of innocence merely poſſible, is a full confutation of the opinion advanced in its ſtead. But granting us our Paradiſiacal ſtate, you think the *ſhort* duration * of this perfection, is as inconſiſtent with infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs, as though ſuch ſtate of perfection

* Origin of Evil, p. 42. † Ibid.

had

had never exiſted. To which let me reply, that however ſcrupulouſly you may acquieſce in the moſt literal * interpretation of the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation, when you think it will ſerve your purpoſe, all your ſkill in divinity will not enable you to tell me how *ſhort* that period was.

" The Stoics, you obſerve, ſeem to have " had ſome dark and unintelligible notions " of this inherent imperfection in the nature " of all created beings †." Dark and unintelligible as their notions may appear; they approach much nearer the truth, than the doctrines of any other of thoſe ancient ſages, who took upon them to inſtruct the heathen world in the precepts of religion and morality: a ſtrong proof this of the neceſſity of a revelation to ſet us right in theſe important ſubjects.

* Origin of Evil, p. 52. † Ibid. p. 50.

Indeed,

Indeed, ſo ſtrongly do our paſſions plead with us for gratification, ſo prevalent is the influence of vice in our corrupt nature, derived from cuſtom and example; that it is no wonder, if to thoſe, who took their notions chiefly from what they felt paſs within themſelves, and had only the faint glimmerings of reaſon to direct them in their enquiries, moral evil ſhould appear, as confirmed and inveterate habits uſually do, to ſpring from the very conſtitution of human nature.

But there is a well-known tenet of the Stoics, which plainly ſhews, that *their* notions of human nature were, in fact, very different from thoſe, which ſuppoſe an innate imperfection in it. They accounted nothing a real evil, but the evil of ſin*:

* Nihil eſt malum; niſi quod turpe atque vitioſum eſt. Cic. Tuſc. Diſp.

and

and this they ſuppoſed no neceſſary inherent fault in human nature; as appears clear in that they acknowledge a ſtate of perfect happineſs attainable. The perfectly wiſe man, ſay they, is perfectly virtuous; and being perfectly virtuous, he is neceſſarily free from all real evil, and conſequently perfectly happy. Here then we find a ſect of philoſophers aſſerting the reality of a ſtate of perfection on the principles of reaſon; which, wild and extravagant as ſuch tenets are, with reſpect to our preſent depraved condition, and the perverted order of things, ſeems ſtrongly to con firm the truth of ſuch a ſtate having exiſted: unleſs their notions are abſolutely and entirely without any foundation at all.

Having premiſed theſe few obſervations in regard to the poſſibility of a ſtate of innocence, the more cloſely to confine myſelf to the point in queſtion, and your own train of reaſoning upon it, I will obſerve the plan laid

laid down, and prepare ſtep by ſtep to follow you through the gloomy ranks of evil. One claſs of which are acknowledged to be no evils at all; another we ſhall find to be evils of our own contracting; and all the reſt, their vitiated progeny.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR,

THE conſideration of Evils of Imperfection, is the object of your ſecond letter; which I am glad to find ſtruck out of the black catalogue. For though writers on this ſubject have in the claſs of evils entered thoſe of imperfection; properly ſpeaking, there is no ſuch thing as imperfection in any created Being whatever; or, if you will call the limitation of natural powers, aſſigned to the different ſpecies of Beings, by ſo harſh a name; ſuch imperfection is no evil. A man may, if he pleaſe, call an aſs fooliſh, a ſheep weak, and a toad ugly; but he cannot without great impropriety call any of them imperfect: each being created with powers, beſt calculated to promote its own happineſs, and to ſupply its wants. Why

 then

then will you acknowledge perfection in the whole, yet think it abſurdity to ſuppoſe it in all its parts *? If you mean abſolute perfection; your meaning is, that an aſs, a ſheep, or a toad has not the perfections of the Deity: A point I am not inclined to diſpute with you. But if your term imply no more than relative perfection, which, when we ſpeak of any rank of created beings, is all the perfection uſually contended for; I deny the abſurdity of the ſuppoſition, and humbly preſume there is diſcernible in each ſpecies the ſame perfection you acknowledge in the Great Whole.

There are real evils enough diſcernible in human nature, without torturing our invention in queſt of imaginary ones. If we content ourſelves with a rational enquiry into thoſe only which are properly our own, and to the introduction of which we ourſelves are

* Origin of Evil, p. 66.

unqueſ-

unqueſtionably acceſſary; we ſhall find every other evil, that can be called really ſuch, by ſome ſecret connection reſulting from them, depending on them, and gradually increaſing with them. And if, in this depraved ſtate of things, we could reform from ſuch evils as are evidently of our own contracting; all others, however ſeemingly innate, would neceſſarily vaniſh: and we ſhould find ourſelves to be, without any alteration in our nature, that happy, perfect creature, which tradition reports us, hiſtory repreſents us, and in thoſe ſtruggles that a virtuous man has with his paſſions, ever labouring after a height and degree of virtue, which yet he feels and acknowledges himſelf unable to attain to, reaſon ſeems to confirm us to have been.

On the whole, Sir, in this your letter on the evils of imperfection, there appears little, that might not without any detriment to your ſubject have been omitted; no great matter to except againſt, and nothing to ap-

prove; unleſs a pretty diſſertation on the wiſdom and goodneſs of providence. Which, give me leave to tell you, ſerves abundantly to convince me, that *thoſe ready-made arguments, with which middle-ſized underſtandings are well fitted from every pulpit*, however contemptuouſly you may affect to treat them, are frequently made much uſe of by the * *learned, impartial, ſagacious, and inquiſitive*, ſuch as yourſelf; and ſuch, as to uſe your own words, *you alone apply to.* Set off with a little florid colouring, they have given life and vigour to many a flimſy performance, that had little elſe to recommend it, beſides an affectation of ſingularity, and a ſpecious air of thinking freely.

I have the honour to be, Sir, &c.

* Preface to the Free Enquiry, p. 23.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

SIR,

FAR as we have hitherto proceeded in our Enquiry, no interruption have we met with from real evils: it having been proved, that nothing imperfect could come out of the hands of an all-wiſe, all-mighty Creator; or, if a limitation of the powers of any ſpecies of created Beings can be called imperfection, that ſuch imperfection is no evil. The ſubject of your next letter is natural evil; and the grand queſtion you there propoſe to ſolve is, "Why God, whoſe "only motive in creating Beings muſt be "the production of happineſs, ſhould yet "condemn them, by an abſolute neceſſity "of nature, to innumerable and unavoid-"able miſeries *?" Your ſolution of which

* Origin of Evil, p. 76, 77.

difficulty is this: "theſe evils could not "have been prevented, without the loſs of "greater good*." But the queſtion preſuppoſes a fact that is abſolutely falſe; ſince thoſe evils can never be derived from a neceſſity of nature, from which ſome men are wholly exempt: and you attempt to ſolve a ſeeming difficulty, by ſubſtituting a real one in its room. For, when it is aſſerted, that pains of body, inquietudes of mind, and the like evils, muſt fall on ſome, in order to promote the happineſs of others: will not the objector immediately aſk, How, and in what manner, the ſufferings of one man can, in a phyſical ſenſe, be ſuppoſed to conduce to the happineſs of another? Here you have raiſed a real difficulty, of which I find not that you have offered any ſolution at all. So far from it, you acknowledge it *inconceiveable* how they operate; and even, that they do ſo operate, to be only a mere

* Origin of Evil, p. 78.

proba-

probability *? But why ſhould a man ſtep out of the common road to attack a religion, the doctrines of which, if ſometimes above the reach of reaſon, have never been proved to be in contradiction with it; whoſe moral part forms a purer ſyſtem of ethics, than human wiſdom ever deviſed; and which, conſidered merely as the religion of your country, demands ſome regard:—Why rudely labour to ſubvert the eſtabliſhed doctrines of ſuch a religion, only to ſubſtitute in their room bare probabilities, and your own *inconceivable* notions?

But if we do not content ourſelves with a partial view of things, nor take up with bare matters of fact without endeavouring to acquaint ourſelves with the meaning of them; we ſhall find, that natural evils are no other than the evils, God has annexed as natural conſequences of our vices: A truth this,

* Origin of Evil, p. 96.

prettily allegoriſed by the heathen poets, in the Fable of Pandora; who is feigned by an act of diſobedience to have introduced into the world all manner of evil.

—γυνη χείρεσσι πιθου μεγα πωμ' αφελουσα
Εσκιδασ', ανθρωποισι δ' ειμησατο κηδεα λυγρα·
Αιψα γαρ εν κακοτητι βροτοι καταγηρασκουσι.
HER. περι εργ: ημ:

The fatal charge the curious fair unlocks;
Straight iſſuing from the interdicted box
Of ills a num'rous train with harſh alloy
Embitter life, and marr each former joy, &c.

Thoſe evils the author has comprehended under the following heads: Poverty, Labour, Inquietudes of Mind, Pains of Body, and Death. Whether they be really deducible from an abſolute neceſſity of nature, or the cauſe we have ventured to aſſign, will be further ſeen by a diſtinct and impartial review of them.

With

With ſo little propriety can poverty be eſteemed an evil of nature; that at the beginning of the creation it was abſolutely impoſſible that poverty ſhould exiſt. For, as nature is content with little, our wants were originally few: and it was in every man's power to gratify his deſires, and provide himſelf with a ſufficient ſupply of whatever he judged neceſſary and conducive to the comforts and conveniencies of life. This may fairly be ſuppoſed, without having recourſe to a ſuppoſition, which is no abſurd one, and would ſet the matter in a much clearer light; that the earth ſpontaneouſly produced her fruits, "the herb yielding "ſeed, and the tree yielding fruit after "its kind."

——— *Nulli ſubigebant arva coloni:*
Nec ſignare quidem, aut partiri limite campum
Fas erat: in medium quærebant: ipſaque tellus
Omnia liberius, nullo poſcente, ferebat. VIRG.

It

It was ambition and avarice on the one hand, and diſſipation and indolence on the other, that produced poverty: and if there ever was a time when theſe moral evils did not ſubſiſt; there was a time when the cry of poverty was not heard.

The conſequence of poverty is labour; and therefore primarily deducible from the ſame cauſe. By which term is underſtood the drudgery and toils, which one part of mankind undergoes to ſupport the other in affluence and eaſe For the labour, which it might be neceſſary for each individual to ſuſtain, in order to provide himſelf with the comforts and conveniencies of life in a ſtate of nature, would not only be no evil, but a real good. Man is born to labour; and as our benevolent Creator has made it neceſſary to our ſubſiſtence, ſo alſo has he made it conducive to the health and vigour both of body and mind: and has likewiſe annexed to it a proper degree of pleaſure and ſatisfaction.

faction. Some of the greateſt geniuſes of the heathen world, as hiſtory informs us, ſuch too as have been moſt eminent for virtue, and who therein approached the neareſt to man's original perfection, have amuſed themſelves with the plough, the pruning-hook, and other rural employments. And if in the moſt obſcure retreat theſe interpoſing labours, ſeconding the pleaſing intereſting contemplations of the mind; if this harmonious concord of the intellectual and bodily faculties thus mutually aiding and relieving each other, cannot afford us a more ſubſtantial happineſs than any other pleaſures in life, however eagerly hunted after; it is becauſe of thoſe wretched refinements, which ſin, or moral evil, has effected in human nature.

The inquietudes of the mind muſt be acknowledged real, and perhaps the greateſt evils, to which human nature is liable. Theſe, if we trace them to their true ſource,

we

we ſhall find principally ariſe from remorſe at having committed what was wrong, and from bitter recollection of having omitted to do what was right. Which two cauſes of uneaſineſs, as they depend entirely on ourſelves, may in a great meaſure, even in the preſent ſtate of things, be precluded, by always impowering our reaſon to direct our actions: or in other words, by ever doing that which we know to be right, and conſtantly avoiding what we ſuſpect * to be otherwiſe

But all inquietudes of mind are not to be contracted within ſo narrow a compaſs. While we have paſſions, and ſo much moral evil abounds in the world, theſe paſſions will ſometimes unavoidably launch out into vicious extremes. We cannot forbear being

* It is a maxim laid down by the moraliſts: that, to doubt the rectitude of an action, is a proof that it is not abſolutely and ſtrictly right: and therefore a ſufficient reaſon for declining it.

troubled

troubled at the undutifulneſs of children, the ingratitude of thoſe whom we have obliged, the inſincerity of friends, and the infamous aſperſions of ſlander and malevolence. The Stoical apathy is abſolutely unattainable; and theſe diſquieting affections of the mind may be ſo far termed natural, as they work ſo forcibly and univerſally, that the moſt cool and diſpaſſionate cannot be wholly inſenſible of them. Yet, who ſees not that they originally proceed from *moral* evils? Since, if there was no ſuch thing as ingratitude, ſlander, &c. the mind could ſuffer uneaſineſs on none of theſe accounts.

Pains of body are evils more clearly and demonſtratively deducible from vice, than any of the former. They are certain conſequences of indolence, luxury, and intemperance: often derived from our own exceſſes; and often from thoſe of our anceſtors. Diſeaſe rolls in the chariot, and lolls upon the bed of down: our ſoops and delicate viands

viands are full of theſe ills; they ſparkle in the intoxicating glaſs, and unnerve in the embrace of harlots. If any one doubts whether human nature could ever be abſolutely free from that train of diſeaſes, which at preſent ſeem to reign almoſt univerſally; let him viſit the peaſant's cottage, and he will there find many inſtances of perſons, who have arrived at the verge of life, without ever experiencing the rackings of ſickneſs and diſeaſe; which amounts to a full proof that theſe evils are not inherent in human nature, but are the wretched progeny of human vices.

Let us then repreſent to ourſelves one of theſe happy ruſtics, who has almoſt finiſhed his courſe of life, with a conſcience ever void of offence, and a body free from aches and ſickneſs. Suppoſe him paſſed through all the various ſcenes that chequer human life, and heartily tired with the dull irkſome repetition of a continual ſameneſs, as may very eaſily be

the

the caſe; ſince perhaps a principal ſource of the pleaſures of life is novelty: and may he not meet the embraces of death with as much complacency and ſatisfaction, and perhaps too with as little pain, as he would ſink into the arms of its near relation, ſleep *? To ſuch an one can death be properly ſtyled an evil? Or, does it not rather deſerve the firſt place in the fair train of bleſſings †: as it not only delivers him from the tediouſneſs of ſuch thoughts as ſerve but to mortify him with the recollection of thoſe pleaſures, which he muſt never again enjoy; but, now that every ſhort lived gratification palls and

* Conſanguineus leti ſopor. VIRG.

Of this opinion is the wild philoſopher Rouſſeau: ſuch perſons, he thinks, as have by ſtrength of conſtitution and a temperate life, lived free from ſickneſs and diſeaſe — *ils s' eteignent enfin, ſans qu' on s' apperçoive, qu' ils ceſſent d' etre, & preſque ſans s' en appercevoir eux-memes.*

ROUSSEAU ſur Fundemens de L' Inegalite, &c.

† Ut doceam, non modo non malum eſſe, ſed bonum etiam eſſe, mortem. CIC.

ſickens

ſickens upon him, opens to his view new ſcenes of untaſted happineſs?

Let death then be diſcharged from the gloomy company of evils, into which you have without cauſe introduced him; and all the reſt are clearly owing not to the original imperfection of human nature, but the dreadful breaches that ſin hath made in it. For, as to thoſe accidental hurts, to which the body is liable, nor ever could be exempt from, ſuch as the fracture of a bone, the diſlocation of a joint, &c. they belong not to the claſs of evils here treated of, but are to be ranked under thoſe of imperfection. And it would be no leſs abſurd to arraign the goodneſs of God for not making us of adamant and ſteel, than for ſuffering our frame to be liable to ſuch harms as theſe.

Which then of all the various evils that man labours under, and are called natural, can be juſtly and properly imputed to the fault of

of his nature; from which of all the numerous train is it *impoſſible* he could ever have been free; or from whence can they be ſo rationally deduced, as from that grand ſource to which they have been traced back, from moral evil? That foul fountain from whence iſſue all the ſtreams of evil, that flow through the vale of mortal life, and taint the happineſs for which man was originally deſigned, is the next ſubject of Enquiry.

But before we proceed to that point, I ſhall, with all deference to your ſuperior judgment, hazard my ſentiments of a fact, of which you ſeem not thoroughly to have entered into the meaning. Speaking of the analogy between pleaſure and pain, you obſerve, that "* many in Chriſtian countries have been "ſainted for long faſting, for whipping and "tormenting themſelves, for ſitting whole "years in uneaſy poſtures, &c. And that

* Origin of Evil, p. 93.

" many at this day in the Eaſt are almoſt " deified for loading themſelves with heavy " chains, bending under burthens, and the " like." From whence you ſuppoſe, that where theſe cuſtoms prevailed, the people had ſome dark notions of the merit of ſufferings abſtracted from their tendency to any viſible good: which notions, you apprehend, muſt be founded on the neceſſity of pain to produce happineſs. But the true reaſon of theſe practices appears eaſy to be aſcertained, without having recourſe to notions merely chimerical; and which, were they ever ſo true, can never be proved to be ſo. The fear of eternal miſery, becauſe diſtant, will on many minds operate leſs forcibly in deterring men from ſin, than the dread of a ſevere puniſhment being inflicted upon the immediate commiſſion of it: and even where that is not the caſe, this motive will always co-operate with, and enforce the other. And on this principle were inſtituted thoſe corporal puniſhments, which are ſtill practiſed by the

the Papiſts; ſometimes enjoined them by their confeſſors, and ſometimes their own voluntary act: neither are they conſidered in this view ſo abſolutely devoid of reaſon, as they have been generally repreſented. And as to thoſe who walk barefoot, crouch under burthens, or load themſelves with chains; it is well known, that this variety of ſevere diſcipline is undergone chiefly in order to move pity and compaſſion in the beholders: and ſo good an effect has it, that ſuch objects ſeldom fail of a plentiful alms. Another argument, which may perhaps plead the cauſe of theſe zealots more powerfully than pity, is a general perſuaſion, that the alms ſo diſpoſed of will be applied to ſome good and pious uſe, as the founding of a moſque, an hoſpital, or the like: and, indeed, ſuch their intention is ſometimes ſpecified by the ſupplicants on labels, which they carry about them. Accordingly with the gains thus acquired, which is often very conſiderable, the devotee builds or endows a convent, or a moſque.

And hence it is, that *the higheſt honours are ſometimes paid to them, as to common benefactors.* For I will venture to affirm, that hiſtory cannot produce one ſingle inſtance in any age or nation, of the higheſt honours being decreed to perſons, who have voluntarily expoſed themſelves to ſufferings, abſtracted from their tendency to ſome viſible good.

The farther I read, the more clearly am I convinced of the power and livelineſs of your imagination, and that conjecture is indiſputably your fort: while you are merely conjectural, you are entertaining; but when you pretend to reaſon and explain, you are out of your ſphere, and very unſatisfactory.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER

LETTER V.

SIR,

WE are now come to the grand point in queſtion; whether man came out of the hands of his Creator, what he at preſent appears, and feels and acknowledges himſelf to be: ſo impotent of reaſon, ſuch a dupe to paſſion, with a will ſo prone to evil, in a word, the imperfect thing he is.

Perhaps the knowledge of no one ſpeculative truth is ſo natural and univerſal, as the knowledge of good and evil; nothing is ſo eaſy to be aſcertained, as when an action is really good, and when really evil. Yet ſcarce any thing ſeems to have perplexed moral writers more, than fully and properly to define them; as appears from the variety of definitions that are given of them, and

which are almoſt as numerous as the authors who have treated on the ſubject. Muſt it not ſeem ſtrange then, that though the diſcernment of moral good and evil be as natural to the mind, as the perception of light and darkneſs is to the eye; an immutable, univerſal principle, in which every man is ſelf-taught, yet no one has been able by any ſatisfactory criterion to determine what it is, and wherein it conſiſts. Let the moſt rude and uncivilized man hear of a virtuous action, and he will naturally be pleaſed with it; and an evil action will proportionably diſguſt him. Aſk him why he diſlikes the one, and admires the other; and I am of opinion he would find it a very difficult matter to give a tolerable reaſon. Paradoxical as this may appear, there are facts in the natural world, ſuch as are the immediate objects of our ſenſes, that operate no leſs unaccountably. Who, for inſtance, has told us what beauty is, deduced it to a general definition, or fixed the true ſtandard of it? Yet

Yet on ſight of a really beautiful object, taſtes however different concur in admiring it: and by a kind of inſtinctive knowledge, we perceive and confeſs the reality of beauty, in that we are charmed with the influence of it. From this diverſity of ſentiments therefore concerning the criterion of virtue, no argument can be brought againſt the reality of it: and if all the definitions we can form of it be imperfect, this can only be aſcribed to the narrowneſs of our ideas.

The definition you propoſe, confines virtue to a tendency to promote general good *, and is therefore objectible to, as being too limited. To contribute to the general happineſs is certainly a branch of virtue, and a principal one too: but then this is only referable to our conduct in reſpect of others; and moral virtue may exiſt independent of it. Fortitude and reſolution in bearing the mi-

* Origin of Evil, p. 112.

ſeries of life, is as unqueſtionably a virtue, as juſtice, benevolence, or any other moral duty whatever: but this relates wholly to a man's ſelf, and is naturally no more productive of public good than evil; and which ever is conſequential of it, is merely accidental. Hence then it appears that this criterion of your's, though not falſe, is defective. It is true, that whatever contributes to the general bliſs, is virtuous: but it is as true, that actions may be denominated virtuous, without having any natural tendency to public utility. There are duties that we owe to God and ourſelves, ſuch as with reſpect to others may be ſtiled indifferent, the obſervance of which is nevertheleſs morally good, and for a diſregard and neglect of them we are juſtly chargeable with vice. Perhaps an inſtance may contribute to place this matter in a clearer light. Let us ſuppoſe that Cæſar was aſſaſſinated by his ſon; and, that by his death mankind was delivered from an oppreſſor, and the Roman common-wealth

reſtored

reſtored to liberty. If, according to your criterion, moral good is to be eſtimated by its tendency to general utility, this action of Brutus is abſolutely good: yet parricide, according to all notions of right and wrong whatever, is abſolutely evil; but that an action ſhould be abſolutely good, and abſolutely evil at the ſame time, is a flat contradiction in terms.

The truth is, an action, before it can be denominated virtuous, muſt, beſides contributing to the general good, have reſpect to him who does it, and his duty to himſelf; and alſo to the commands and prohibitions of him who has afforded us a rule of action, unleſs reaſon and conſcience were afforded us in vain. And whenever an action appears good with reſpect to theſe three relations, it may then be pronounced ſtrictly and in the higheſt degree virtuous. Virtues there are, or rather branches of virtue, which regard each of theſe relations ſeparately, without interfering with

with either of the others. But when an action, however conformable to one of theſe relations, however productive of public good, claſhes with either, or, as may be, with both the other; that action can with as little propriety be ſtiled a virtuous action, as the man, who by irreverence, or neglect diſhonours his Creator, or by debauchery and voluptuouſneſs debilitates his body, and ſtupifies his mind, can be called virtuous; becauſe he pays his juſt debts, and makes his money circulate. Indeed we are told, all that you mean is; that whatever produces good in general is virtue, and that whatever in general produces evil is vice: and this rule is to be * *applied to the general ſpecies of actions, and not to particular actions.* To which it is replied, that a definition of virtue, which does not extend to *every* caſe is defective. Whatever produces happineſs, muſt *always* and *in all caſes* be virtue; elſe that definition of it is

* Origin of Evil, p. 113.

an

an imperfect one. For virtue is and muſt be ever and invariably the ſame.

Not to rob then the nobleſt principle, that animates the human mind, of more than half its praiſe, by confining it to a tendency to promote a little temporary good, which is not to be confined to the limits of this globe; nor yet to render it more unintelligible by ſubſtituting words inſtead of meaning, ſuch as we cannot perfectly underſtand ourſelves, and are therefore not likely to explain to others: let us content ourſelves with knowing that virtue conſiſts in an abſolute implicit obedience to the divine will; in the obſervance of an univerſal law, a rule of conduct ſtamped upon the mind of man from the beginning by his all-wiſe Creator. This was the law which was originally afforded Adam whereby to regulate his actions: who was formed perfect according to the rank of human nature, with a healthful body, a clear and diſcerning mind. And how forcibly it muſt

muſt act in the perfect ſtate of human nature, may be in ſome meaſure conceived from thoſe effects of it, which the mind, depraved and corrupted as it is, ſtill ſtrongly experiences in the alarming dictates of conſcience *. This was the law, which by vice and prejudice became in a courſe of ages ſo wretchedly perverted and obſcured, that Moſes was ſent to revive, explain, and enforce it: and which Chriſt came down from Heaven to perfect and fulfill.

Where then ſhall we expect to find this almoſt obliterated principle? Not in the vague gueſſes of the fanciful ſpeculatiſt; nor yet in the doubtful diſquiſitions of ſophiſtry and metaphyſicks; nor indeed any where but in that univerſal law which has been graciouſly diſpenſed to us, to ſupply its place.

* See Diſcourſe on Conſcience.

To

To conſider then this principle of virtue, implanted in the human mind from the beginning, and by extraordinary interpoſitions of providence at ſucceſſive periods enforced; the practice of it enjoined us with a view to our happineſs, and in ſo eminent a manner conducing to our good here, and our exaltation in the next ſtate; it ſeems a paradox, as you obſerve, to ſee mankind in their general conduct continually counteracting the gracious deſigns of their Maker. The uſual ſolution of this difficulty is affirmed to be "falſe in all its principles *." That is, man neither came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, nor endued with a freedom of will and action; nor if God had created him both perfect and free, would that in the leaſt have juſtified the introduction of wickedneſs and miſery. We will examine the truth of theſe poſitions ſeparately. But firſt I muſt take the liberty to obſerve, that

* Origin of Evil, p. 126.

in

in acknowledging, as you do *, an original depravity in human nature; you are making a conceſſion, of which I apprehend you are not aware. For depravity, if I underſtand the import of the word, means a marring, ſpoiling, or corruption, not barely the imperfection of human nature. By ſuch conceſſion you admit the very thing, againſt which you are levelling your whole artillery of ſhrewdneſs and learning.

Man's original perfection, you obſerve, "is a falſe notion, derived from the philoſophers of the firſt ages, founded on their ignorance of the Origin of Evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypotheſis †." Which is, in other words, they ſuppoſed ſuch a ſtate, becauſe ſuch an hypotheſis appeared to them the moſt rational and probable: an obſervation, which I am ſure does not prove it to be a *falſe notion*.

* Origin of Evil, p. 125. † Ibid. p. 127.

To

To this bare aſſertion of yours ſtands oppoſed the authority of one of the greateſt geniuſes and ſoundeſt philoſophers of all antiquity, who with regard to this matter is remarkably expreſs. "This account of the "happy age, ſays he,* has been handed "down from the moſt ancient times; and "our anceſtors who lived neareſt to the firſt "revolution of the world were witneſſes "and unexceptionable aſſerters of the truth "of it *."

But your grand objection to the probability of man's original perfection is, that it would be the alteration of his nature; and that, as ſoon as he became perfect, he muſt ceaſe to be a man. In order to determine the force of this objection, it is neceſſary to enquire what is the true nature of man. Is

* Απεμνημονευετο δε υπο των ημετερων προγονων των προ-τερων, οι τελυτωσι μεν τη προτερα περιφορα τον εξης χρονον εγειτονουν, της δε κατ αρχας εφυοντο. τουτων γαρ ουτοι κηρυκες εγενοντ' ημιν των λογων. PLATO Πολιτ:

he

he not a being partly ſenſitive, and partly rational? If ſo; the right notion of human nature is either this, "a rational principle, "conducting and governing the paſſions:" "or elſe it is this, "a rational principle, "depreſſed by and ſubject to the tyranny of "inordinate paſſions." If this be the right notion of human nature; the gift of reaſon can ſerve no other purpoſe than that of rendering us miſerable. But all the general diſpenſations of an infinitely good God muſt tend to promote good and happineſs.

That is the great center to which every general diſpenſation of providence tends like a ray from the circle of human life. Such a notion therefore of the nature of man, as ſuppoſes his rational faculties beſtowed upon him only to make him miſerable, muſt be falſe: and conſequently the other notion is the juſt and true one.

As

As reaſon then was graciouſly afforded us by our Creator to regulate the paſſions; unleſs all our ideas of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs are very falſe and imperfect, it muſt be ſufficient to anſwer the end. From whence it appears not only probable but clear, from the faireſt deductions of reaſon, that man was originally endued with every quality in the higheſt degree ſuited to his nature, and, if properly exerted, neceſſary to promote his good; which amounts to what is underſtood by man's original perfection.

On the ſuppoſition then, that man was created perfect; the introduction of moral evil is, I think, a ſufficient proof, that he was likewiſe created free. But independent of that ſuppoſition, his free agency may be briefly proved from your own conceſſions. You acknowledge man "to have "ſuch a degree of free-will, as to make "him accountable, and juſtly puniſhable "for the abuſe of it *." We are juſtly ac-

* Free Enquiry, p. 128.

countable for an action as it is good or evil, only as we have it in our power to avoid the one, and perform the other. If therefore we have a degree of free-will ſufficient to render us accountable and juſtly puniſhable for our actions; we have free-will ſufficient to enable us to avoid the commiſſion of ſuch actions: and that is all the free-will contended for *.

* To the above remark, in the Enquirer's own words, take his reply. "*To all this the Author replies,* "*only, that he is aſſured, that, if any* intelligent *Reader will peruſe the whole together with candour and attention, it will evidently appear that theſe accuſations are entirely groundleſs. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with free will, and is juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; and hopes he has ſo expreſſed himſelf through this whole Piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that queſtion: all he means is, that though the abuſe of free will is undoubtedly the immediate cauſe of moral evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admiſſion into the works of a benevolent Creator; becauſe man not being a ſelf-exiſtent and independent being, muſt receive that will itſelf, together with his nature and formation, from the ſupreme Author of all things: for which reaſon he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedneſs of mankind*

Theſe propoſitions then being true, that man was created perfect and free; the conſequence appears to me plain, and the argu-

" *can be an accident proceeding from their unforeſeen*
" *wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent ſyſtem*
" *is defeated; but muſt be a part, and a material part*
" *too, of the original plan of creation, wiſely calculated*
" *by the* incomprehenſible *operations of vice and puniſh-*
" *ment, to promote the good and happineſs of the whole.*"
Preface to the laſt Edit. of Free Enquiry, p. 15.

Is there not the very ſame inconſiſtency in this comment, that was before detected in the original doctrine? And does not this his unwillingneſs to recant in a matter of the moſt glaring abſurdity *prove* him guilty of that obſtinacy, with which in general terms, he ſo unfairly charges all who diſſent from him? The ſum of the long paſſage above quoted, juſt amounts to this: the Enquirer makes no doubt, but man is endued with free will enough to render him juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; notwithſtanding he is by nature neceſſarily determined to ſuch abuſe of it in order to promote the good and happineſs of the whole by the *incomprehenſible* operations of vice and puniſhment. If this be not an incomprehenſible doctrine, I know not what is. For where is the freedom of will, if the Soul be by nature determined to Evil: or where the juſtice of puniſhing a Being for actions, to the commiſſion of which he was by nature unavoidably determined: or laſtly, how can reaſon be brought

ment concluſive: that therefore the introduction of ſin, or moral evil into the world, is not imputable to God, nor the neceſſary

to reconcile ſuch a ſyſtem, as the Enquirer would obtrude on us, with divine juſtice, or goodneſs, or wiſdom, or power?

In order to account for the introduction of moral evil, he in effect denies the exiſtence of it. For when once evil becomes ſo neceſſary as he repreſents it, it loſes its nature as a moral evil; for a moral evil implies in it a voluntary breach of ſome known law: but how can that breach be voluntary, which was cauſed by an infinite power in the moſt proper way of efficiency?

The truth is, the whole ſtrength of argument here exerted is levelled at a quarter, I know none who will undertake to defend: I know none, who ground the introduction of moral evil on the doctrine of free will. To account for the fall of man from the nature of liberty, would be to ſuppoſe it the certain conſequence of his liberty; and if it was the certain conſequence of his liberty, no blame could be imputed to him, nor any puniſhment in ſtrict juſtice inflicted on him. But to reconcile ſuch fall with the attributes of God from the nature of liberty, is a quite different thing; is what we may do, what we muſt do: for reaſon cannot reconcile the fall of man with the infinite goodneſs and juſtice of God on any other principle. Objects of

deſire

conſequence of human nature; but very reconcileable with reaſon, and the high ideas reaſoning Beings have of the divine attributes, in conſideration of the abuſe that man might make of that high yet dangerous truſt repoſed in him, his freedom of will and action. True it is, that his Creator might have put it out of his power to have committed ſin, by endowing him with a greater degree of perfection; or by reſtraining his will; but I dare not ſay, "he had "much better have done ſo *." God might have created him a Being neceſſarily determined to what was good; but then he would have been no longer man: both the beauty and reward of virtue would then have been

deſire without, and appetites liable to be excited by them within, to which we may add the evil ſollicitations of malignant ſpirits, were, as we are informed, the cauſe of our ruin, though not the neceſſary one. Freedom of will ſtamped the conduct of man, in inclining to thoſe ſollicitations, with the character of evil: but freedom of will was not the cauſe of ſuch evil.

* Origin of Evil, p. 130.

loſt; and this world would have been a ſtate of rewards, and not of probation. And this is the reaſon, why Simplicius in his Commentary on the thirty-fourth chapter of Epictetus, though no friend to Chriſtianity, did in this article entirely fall in with the ſcriptural account; attributing the Origin of Evil not to matter, but to the will of man.

God, from the beginning of time foreſaw the ill uſe man would make of this gift of free will; and therefore prepared a remedy; the redemption of mankind by the promiſed ſeed who ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head. However ingenious therefore may be your conjectures, the rational Enquirer may ſtop here in his ſearch after the Origin of Evil. In endeavouring to inveſtigate it more nicely, he will only be apt to loſe himſelf in the endleſs mazes of error and perplexity.

Was ever for inſtance, a more extravagant conjecture, than what you hazard in the

the 131ſt and following pages. The introduction of natural evil, 'tis there aſſerted, God could not prevent. And he cauſed moral evil to be introduced, in order to give an air of juſtice to natural evil; being thus made as it were the puniſhment of ſin: therefore, becauſe according to your ſuppoſition it was neceſſary that one man ſhould have the ſtone, the gout, or rheumatiſm; he, or ſome other man, for it ſignifies not who, muſt cut a throat, pick a pocket, or break open a houſe; in order to make thoſe diſeaſes an act of divine juſtice in the puniſhment of ſin.

I hope, Sir, I do not miſunderſtand you, I am ſure I do not voluntarily. And I expect the ſame from you, in my attempt to explain two words which you are pleaſed to charge with a *contradiction in terms* *, viz. original ſin. *Original ſignifying innate, and ſin*

* Origin of Evil, p. 144.

the act of an accountable Being. Is there any contradiction in calling Adam's, that is, man's firſt tranſgreſſion, the original tranſgreſſion, or original ſin? How *original* comes to ſignify *innate*, perhaps you can explain to me. But, you will add, how does Adam's firſt tranſgreſſion concern me? In it's conſequence, in a ſtain or innate corruption, derived from thence, and from him entailed upon the whole human race. Nor is this ſo highly incredible, as you may at firſt thought ſuppoſe it. That a man may by his vicious amours contract diſorders, which may entail rottenneſs and diſeaſe on his innocent poſteterity, even to the third and fourth generation, cannot be denied. The caſes with regard to the apparent injuſtice of them are ſimilar: experience proves the *reality* of the one, and why will you deny the *poſſibility* of the other? Certain powerful drugs there are, which will change the mind as well as body, and give quite a new turn to the paſſions. Ebriety will work a temporary change

change in the diſpoſition and habits of the mind as really and perfectly, as the Syrens of old are fabled to have done on the body. Where then the impoſſibility; that the good affections originally implanted in human nature ſhould have been corrupted; or that ſuch corruption or ſtain ſhould have been entailed on mankind, even down to remoteſt poſterity.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

HOwever differently you and I may think on ſome points, I am glad to find one in which we are entirely agreed *; viz. that this life is a ſtate of probation: and ſuch not only our wiſe ſelves, but the wiſeſt and moſt thinking men of all ages and nations ſuppoſed it. Man muſt therefore have, beſides the knowledge of good and evil, a freedom of will and action. For if neceſſarily determined to good, where would be the virtue in reſiſting evil? if to evil, where the viciouſneſs in purſuing it? and in either of theſe caſes, where is the trial of his obedience? The abuſe then of this gift of free-will it was, that introduced moral evil into the world; and ſcarce any thing is more obvious,

* Origin of Evil, p. 120.

than

than that political evils are the conſequence of moral. If no ſuch thing can at this day be hoped for as a perfect form of government; it is not becauſe mankind are by nature incapable of receiving or retaining it, but becauſe their vices have made them ſo. If we conſider the hydra-nature of vice, one of whoſe heads is ſeldom ſtruck off, but from the prolific trunk ſprout out at leaſt two; if we reflect on the ſtrong force of example, by which the numerous progeny increaſed with mankind, and univerſally diffuſed themſelves: the very notion of a perfect government is abſurd, and the ingenuity of man in the preſent corrupt ſtate of things can in ſpeculation ſcarcely effect it. Private vices would be eternally claſhing with public good: the ſingle vice of avarice, which muſt neceſſarily produce corruption and venality, is alone ſufficient to obſtruct the wheels of the moſt perfect government. But though we muſt diveſt mankind of their vices before we can ſuppoſe them capable of a perfect

a perfect form of government; we need not diveſt them of their nature. The queſtion therefore is not, whether a perfect form of government can now ſubſiſt, but whether it ever could; that is, whether human nature could ever have been capable of it.

To deſcend to particulars, I cannot be perſuaded you have ſufficient grounds for ſo peremptorily characteriſing mankind in their ſtate of nature *, as the bulls and bears, Hobbes repreſents them: fighting for ſuperiority with clubs and fiſts, and availing themſelves of every villainy to obtain it. Burlamaqui on the contrary ſuppoſes, mankind were originally divided into families; and that thoſe families lived under the paternal government of the perſon who was their Chief, as their father or grandfather. Theſe families increaſing, they at length compoſed a national body; governed by the will of

* Origin of Evil, p. 168.

him

him or thoſe, on whom for mutual good they had conferred the authority. I might add to this author many reſpectable names, who ſpeak the ſame language. And pray what hinders, but that mankind unpolluted by vice, unſeduced by example, thus aſſociated for convenience and common good, might make common good their ſtandard and rule of action*,

It is an undeniable truth, that man was created for ſociety; and it is equally certain,

* *Erant*, ut Juſtinus loquitur, *omnia communia & indiviſa omnibus, veluti unum cunctis patrimonium eſſet.* Neque is ſtatus durare non potuit, ſi aut in magna quadam ſimplicitate perſtitiſſent homines, aut vixiſſent inter ſe in mutuâ quadam eximia charitate. Horum alterum, communionem ſcilicet ex ſimplicitate eximia, videre licet in quibuſdam Americæ populis, qui per ſœcula multa ſine incommodo in eo more perſtiterunt. Alterum vero, communionem nimirum ex charitate exhibuerunt olim Eſſeni, deinde Chriſtiani qui Hieroſolymis primi extiterunt, ac nunc quoque non pauci, qui vitam degunt aſceticam.

PUFF. de Jur. Bell. lib. 2. c. 2. §. 2.

that

that the production of happineſs was the divine motive for creating him. Muſt not God then ſeem to counter-act his own gracious purpoſes, in entailing a neceſſity of evil upon this aptitude and diſpoſition for ſociety; which he himſelf with a gracious intention implanted in us? Or, if we think of the Deity reverently and juſtly as we ought, may we not more fairly conclude, that as certainly as we were created for ſociety, we were created to live happily in ſociety? And if the caſe be otherwiſe, if every ſyſtem of government be full of variety of evils: let us enquire into the myſterious cauſe. Neither need we ſearch far for this: ſince, if we content ourſelves with your own relation of facts, it will appear moſt evident, that evils of government are owing univerſally and immediately to moral evils. There is not in all this black catalogue one ſingle evil enumerated, that does not flow from thence. Tyranny and oppreſſion for inſtance are derived from pride, ſelfiſhneſs, and cruelty;

cruelty; violence and corruption, from avarice and diſſipation; war and deſolation, from envy, luſt, revenge, injuſtice, &c. Since then political evils are manifeſtly deducible from moral; before moral evil was introduced into the world, it is impoſſible that political evils could exiſt.

And however you may affect to deſpiſe the common opinion of an original ſtate of innocence; you have not offered one ſingle argument to demonſtrate either the impoſſibility or improbability of it. On the contrary it is ſhewn, that ſuch a notion is moſt agreeable to the nature of man; that it has been handed down by long tradition, and confirmed by the pens of men of the moſt extenſive learning and higheſt abilities. To this purpoſe innumerable quotations might, from various authors, be alledged; but I will content myſelf with only mentioning his notions of this matter, whoſe authority of all heathen writers, is moſt to be depended

depended on. In that happy age, ſaith Plato, God was the only governor; but when the beautiful order of things was perverted, the Deity retired from the helm, and irregularity and confuſion followed. This Platonic theocracy, agreeable to what was before obſerved †, ſuppoſes that mankind originally lived accountable for their actions to no human magiſtrate, nor ſubject to any human laws: God himſelf as it were immediately governing them by that univerſal law of conſcience ſo deeply imprinted in the mind *. An entire freedom from all reſtraint of laws is always enumerated amongſt the bleſſings of the golden age. From whence it plainly appears, that in their notions of a primæval ſtate the ancient ſages did not, as ſome have preſumed, ſuppoſe only a *more* innocent and happy ſtate than the preſent, but a ſtate of *perfect* hap-

* Letter V.

* Νεμοντος δε εκεινου, πολιτειαι ουκ ησαν. PLATO. Pol.

pineſs.

pineſs. Since the ſuppoſition of a ſtate, in which vice prevailed without any laws to controul and reſtrain it, gives us the idea of a ſtate ſo very wretched, as we want a name to expreſs it by.

Hence, as political evils do confeſſedly reſult from moral *, the ſame reaſoning which has been uſed to prove that moral evil was not eſſential to human nature, includes an anſwer to all arguments of its neceſſary imperfection, drawn from the vaſt train of political evils, obſervable in all governments that ſubſiſt; with which indeed they are ſo complicated, that ſuperficially examined they ſeem as it were naturally inherent in them. For could we take away the cauſe, the effect muſt neceſſarily ceaſe. But though to have a perfect form of government, it be neceſſary to be perfectly virtuous; though at this day we are not to look

* Origin of Evil, p. 188.

for a Platonian commonwealth, or Utopia; yet by retrenching the number of our moral evils, we may proportionably abridge our political ones. And conformably to this opinion, you with great truth and propriety remark, that † "these (viz. political evils) "can never be removed, until those (mo-"ral evils) are first amended." Therefore as these imperfections and abuses in government can only be redressed by a reformation of manners; such a reformation every good and worthy man ought to endeavour to effect in his own private capacity; and the legislature is more particularly bound to labour after in a public one. For if, as you affirm, politics be a science, as reducible to certainty as the mathematics; this must be one universal invariable principle of it, viz. the more virtuous a people is, the more great and flourishing, the more secure, prosperous, and happy that nation will be.

† Origin of Evil, p. 188.

This

This is an inconteſtible truth, and the different periods of every ſtate will afford inſtances of it. But perhaps no ſtate more ſtriking ones than the Roman. Whether Rome owed its greatneſs to its virtue or to chance, is the ſubject of one of Machiavel's Diſcourſes. But with due deference to the great Florentine; by queſtioning it, he ſeems to have made a doubt of that which would elſe appear abſolutely unqueſtionable. Chance, that is, ſome unforeſeen, unnoticed, unaccountable accidents, may raiſe a ſiege, or win a battle: but I would as ſoon believe Chance capable of building the city, as of raiſing the ſtate from nothing to univerſal empire, in a long and almoſt uninterrupted war of ſix or ſeven hundred years. Nothing could effect this but a ſteady uniform virtue. And how great that virtue was, may be judged from a ſingle anecdote, that one of their own hiſtorians has left us; and which conveys to the reader a more lively idea of it, than whole volumes written on the ſubject

afford us. "The firſt divorce, *ſays* Val. Max. "that was ever heard of in Rome, hap-"pened in the year of the city 520." How muſt that nation ſuffer in compariſon; in which, if I forget not, an ingenious author has obſerved, that ſeventeen divorces happened in the ſhort ſpace of one year; amongſt thoſe too who pride themſelves on being accounted people of faſhion †. Inviting then as faſhion is, how many more ſeparations may we ſuppoſe to have happened amongſt thoſe of leſs note; who are always fond of aping their ſuperiors, and never more ſo than in their vices!

Speaking with a juſt contempt of ſpeculative politicians, you aſſert, that in politics moſt principles ſpeculatively right, are practically wrong. It may be ſo; but I am ſure the inſtances you produce in ſupport of your aſſertion, do by no means tend to confirm it.

† See Brown's Eſtimate.

On

On the other hand, either ſo unhappy am I in my judgment, or you ſo unfortunate in your proofs, I cannot help thinking they declare directly againſt you. Your firſt inſtance is, that it muſt appear to ſpeculative politicians an undeniable truth, that "thoſe who are "poſſeſt of moſt property, will fight beſt in "its defence." Moſt people, I believe will, on ſpeculative principles, deny that: they will know, that he, who has moſt to loſe, will be apt to be moſt afraid of himſelf: they will know likewiſe, that the mere ſoldier of fortune has moſt likely been brought up hardily, and from the narrowneſs of his circumſtances having been inured to ſtruggle with difficulties and dangers, will therefore be moſt likely to face them with patience and reſolution *:

Ibit eò, quò vis, qui zonam perdidit.

* Cur tantum intereſt inter novum & veterem exercitum, quantum experti ſumus? Ætas tironum plerumque melior: ſed ferre laborem, contemnere Volnus conſuetudo docet. Cic. Tuſc. Diſp. lib. 2. §. 15.

Your

Your next inſtance is, " that national buſi-
" neſs muſt appear to be moſt ſucceſsfully
" carried on by aſſemblies of men unin-
" fluenced and *unconnected.*" Uninfluenced, if you pleaſe, but *unconnected*, I believe few people will allow. He muſt be a whimſical ſpeculatiſt indeed, who can fancy five hundred men, pulling five hundred different ways, will carry on work ſo quickly and ſo well, as the ſame number of men connected, and pulling the ſame way. Your laſt inſtance is a more notable one than either of the other, viz. " that unbounded
" liberty, civil and eccleſiaſtical, muſt ap-
" pear moſt conducive to public happineſs
" and virtue." Indeed, Sir, yourſelf and a few, I hope a very few more, are the whole body of men that can entertain ſuch dangerous opinions.

Theſe inſtances alledged, being ſo very falſe in point, tempt me to diſpute other of your political maxims; and particularly

to

to except to the party-coloured dreſs, in which you have decked your *able ſtateſman.*

Far from flattering the humours of immoral men by falling in with their vices, to ſtop the progreſs of moral evil will be the principal ſcope and aim of the truly great miniſter, which he will ſedulouſly endeavour by every probable method, by the authority of his ſtation, and his own example. And hence may be perceived the difference between a good and able miniſter, and the *great little man*, of whoſe portrait you have drawn ſo accurate a ſketch; between him who makes it his chief care to promote the good of his country, and him who fancies himſelf placed in that diſtinguiſhed ſphere, only to aggrandize himſelf, his friends, and dependants, and ſecure himſelf in the poſſeſſion of ſo much power and gain. The one will ſupport himſelf by his own greatneſs and intrinſic merit; the other will lay hold on every external aſſiſtance.

To an indefatigable attention to buſineſs the one will add diſintereſtedneſs, and unſhaken integrity; the other, fraud and low cunning: the one will not devote his time to pleaſure, becauſe many hours, that the preſſing duties of his ſtation require, will thereby be uſeleſsly ſquandered away; the other will avail himſelf of it, by winning over to his views of intereſt thoſe who are already engaged in the ſame pleaſurable purſuits: the one will defy the voice of envy, the other court its ſilence: the honeſt and upright intentions of the one will appear ſo evident, that fools muſt ſee the good of them, and knaves will not be able to pervert them; the ſelfiſh views of the other muſt be diſguiſed by every art of venality and adulation: the one will confront his enemies, and face their malevolence with a confidence which nothing can inſpire, but a conſcious ſenſe of having diſcharged his duty; the other in ſuch a ſituation will bear himſelf through by effrontery and bribes.

According

According to this repreſentation of things, and in this view only may be reconciled thoſe ſeeming inconſiſtencies, with which you have, by ſome ſuperficial readers, been charged, in your deſcription of *that little creature, a Great Man.*

I have the honour to be, Sir, &c.

LETTER VII.

SIR,

THE ſubject of the ſixth and laſt letter is Religious Evils: of all others, if your reaſoning be concluſive, the moſt enormous, and as you apprehend the moſt difficult to be accounted for: I ſhall therefore be indulged the liberty to examine the weight of your arguments the more circumſtantially.

Man is a being formed with paſſions, but endowed with reaſon to govern them; created for ſociety, and therefore our country, our parents, and our friends, claim part of our regard. For the better conduct of ourſelves with reſpect to theſe ſeveral relations, agreeably to the dignity of our nature, and the end of our creation, the Almighty has furniſhed

furniſhed us with capacities ſufficient to form ſyſtems of ethics and polity, and hath ſo far revealed himſelf to us in the book of nature, that we are enabled to trace him in his works, and from ſuch contemplation of his infinite wiſdom, unbounded power, and tranſcendant goodneſs are naturally led to love, fear, honour, and adore him: which amounts to what we underſtand by religion. Ethics teach us our duty to ourſelves and others; polity, our general conduct conſidered as a community or ſtate; and Religion inculcates our duty to that Being, whom we ſtile God, from whom we derive our exiſtence, and on whom that exiſtence depends. And theſe united, compleat our character as men. For without ſuch reſult of our reaſon, we ſhall diſcern little excellence in human nature above that of the brute creation: diſtinguiſhed only by an erect poſture, we have the honour to ſtrut about upon two legs, whilſt monkeys and aſſes run upon all four.

Strange

Strange is it then, if he who *faſhioned us, and underſtandeth all our parts*, does really underſtand ſo little of our nature, and the nature of thoſe endowments, by which he has thus exalted man above the irrational part of the creation; as that thoſe very faculties, which were intended for our good and happineſs, ſhould, without any will or fault of ours, be conſequentially and inevitably productive of miſery and evil. Or, if he did know it, how * *wonderful* muſt it indeed appear, that Omnipotence ſhould be ſo ſevere and void of all benevolence to his creatures, as to ſuffer them to wander ſo many ages in the dark; and at laſt to afford them a light, but alas! a light ſo faint and glimmering, as ſerved only to affright them! A cruel and capricious God truly: And if this was really the caſe, I am afraid even your ingenuity would find much greater difficulty than you ſeem aware of, in removing the heavy charge

* Origin of Evil, p. 195.

thus

thus wantonly brought againſt Omnipotence. But, if we examine a little more deeply into this matter, it will appear, that neither the firſt ages of the world walked in abſolute and neceſſary darkneſs, nor, *when the fullneſs of time was come that the Sun of brightneſs ſhould appear*, that this light was imperfect.

If we look back as far as hiſtory will carry us, we ſhall find that the practice of religion was univerſally neither ſo * inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid, nor execrable as you ſuppoſe it. Thoſe inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid, and execrable practices were the corruption of later ages; and only tend to ſhew the abſolute neceſſity there was of a Divine Revelation. The annual oblation of the fruits of the earth was originally no more than a tacit acknowledgment of the Omnipotence and providence of God, and a ſignificant confeſſion, that whatever is enjoyed in this world

* Origin of Evil, p. 196.

is

is the free-gift of his good will and pleaſure. The ſame may be affirmed of the ſacrifices; in regard to which, though I love ſenſibility, I cannot but ſmile at the tender concern you expreſs for the innocent herds and flocks *: the cruelty to which was juſt the ſame then, as is exerciſed now the day before every market, throughout this populous city. For the ſlaughtered cattle that were ſacrificed upon feſtivals and ſuch particular occaſions, by Princes, Chiefs, and indeed by all perſons proportionably to their rank and condition in life, were not ſtupidly and uſeleſsly burnt to aſhes, but † were broiled and roaſted for the repaſt of their friends, and the entertainment of the poor: and were well calculated to keep alive the ſpirit of hoſpitality ‡.

* Origin of Evil, p. 196.

† Vid. Hom. Il. lib. i. ver. 459.

‡ And hence it is, that we find the penurious man characteriſed by Theophraſtus for *ſelling* part of his victim. Το μεν ιερειου πλην των ιερειων τα κρεα αποδιδοσθαι.

Thus

Thus we find though the real cauſe of the inſtitution was loſt to the Pagans, they ſaw ſome uſe in it, and continued the practice: The Chriſtian is enabled to trace it back to its firſt origin, and can produce a cauſe equal to ſo general an effect *.

True it is, that ſome nations offered human ſacrifices even to wood and ſtones; yet not as is here aſſerted, *all* nations. For God left not himſelf without witneſs, that even the light of nature which he had implanted in the mind of man, was ſufficient to guide him aright, whilſt the mind remained unobſcured by that corruption and depravity to which we were liable, and which gradually took root in our hearts; and ſo long as reaſon maintained her throne in our minds, unſhaken by the perverſeneſs of our will, and our proneneſs to evil. There was a people, that even in the moſt

* See Letter I.

corrupt

corrupt times retained a true knowledge of the Deity, and worſhipped the true and only God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

But as this light of nature was too faint and glimmering to pierce the almoſt general darkneſs that vice and error had gradually introduced in the world; a more explicit revelation of the divine will was ſeen neceſſary, and therefore graciouſly diſpenſed to us. A light this, neither faint nor glimmering; which terrifies us indeed with the proſpect of future danger, but with no other intent than to enable us to avoid it. This has moſt explicitly informed us, that our ſouls are immortal; it has taught us, that future happineſs will be the reſult of virtue and piety; and that vice as hateful to God will be puniſhed with miſery. That, by having the rewards and puniſhments thus diſtinctly pointed out to us, we might be the more ſtrongly induced, to labour after the one, and cautiouſly to avoid the other.

As

As to the inſufficiency of this light, it ſhall be examined under the four general articles, to which you have objected: *viz.* its *want of univerſality, authenticity, perſpicuity, and policy.* Which objection if juſt, the religion, as you rightly infer, muſt have been ſoon corrupted; and we might then conclude, as you extravagantly aſſert, that its great author never deſigned it to be free from any of theſe imperfections. And yet we ſee that this religion of a day, which like a comet was intended only to blaze a little to amuſe the world, and then vaniſh away, has ſubſiſted for theſe ſeventeen hundred years. Perhaps not without ſome corruptions in the ſeveral ſyſtems that have been formed from it: But upon an impartial enquiry it will appear, that thoſe corruptions were owing to the pride, obſtinacy, or ignorance of the ſeveral ſects, and not to any defect in it's original conſtitution.

He who can confidently aſſert, that *this religion was revealed only to a ſmall and obſcure corner in parables and myſteries**, diſcovers little converſe with thoſe writings, that are relative to it. For by theſe we find, that the firſt propagators of it did not confine their labours to *Judæa*, but extended them into all the various parts of the known world. Nor did they ſeek to foiſt their religion upon barbarous and uncivilized nations only, with a view to take advantage of ignorance and credulity: But thoſe moſt poliſhed ſtates of *Greece* and *Rome* were appealed to; and ſeveral of the moſt learned men of thoſe times and places thought it no derogation either to their learning or wiſdom to embrace chriſtianity. So that I find good reaſon flatly to contradict your aſſertion, and to affirm that *thoſe things were not done in a corner*. And as to the parables, in which Chriſt delivered many of his doctrines, ſo plain and obvious

* Origin of Evil, p. 200.

are

are they; that whoever can hear without prejudice, and judge without partiality, may eaſily comprehend them.

The next argument you advance, in proof that Chriſt never intended his religion to be free from the imperfections † above objected to it, is, that *He guarded not its original purity, by committing it to any written records*, &c. Till there be ſhewn ſufficient reaſon to conclude, that thoſe ſeveral hiſtories of the life of Chriſt are ſpurious; or at leaſt till other authentic hiſtories be produced, in which his life and Actions are otherwiſe recorded; we may fairly eſteem the original purity of his religion as well guarded, as though he had left us a hiſtory of his life under his own hand. For what ends could thoſe deſpiſed, perſecuted men propoſe to ſerve by obtruding errors and falſehoods upon the world: who, as you well obſerve, *were*

† See Letter VII. p. 97.

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honeſt enough to die for the religion they publiſhed. And indeed this obſervation, which you unwarily ſtumble on, is a full proof of the ſincerity of their intentions; and no bad confirmation of the truth of thoſe doctrines, of which they themſelves were ſo thoroughly convinced. Indeed that this reflection would be of no great ſervice to the point you are labouring to eſtabliſh, you ſeem aware; and therefore artfully tack to it a preſumptive aſſertion of your own: *That theſe perſons were notwithſtanding never wiſe enough to underſtand it.*

That a perſon may be charged with a divine commiſſion, the doctrines of which in their full extent may not be perfectly underſtood by him, is a point I readily accede to: and that ſuch a defect of comprehenſion in the perſon ſo charged, is no objection to the reality of his inſpiration, I expect you will as readily allow. Inſpiration according to the preciſe import of the word, implies not men's private conceptions, but doctrines

doctrines ſuggeſted by divine influence and direction. The authors of the inſpired writings might or might not comprehend the doctrines they promulgated: and which they taught, not becauſe they were underſtood by them, but becauſe they were divinely delegated to them. Their own private comprehenſion therefore of the doctrines the Evangeliſts publiſhed, is a matter of no conſequence: it cannot always be clearly aſcertained; much leſs can your aſſertion be allowed, or otherwiſe ſupported, than by ſhewing that they advanced idle articles of faith, which they endeavoured to explain in an abſurd, irrational manner. And whenever that is made appear, more of truth may be acknowledged in this letter, than an unprejudiced reader can reſt at preſent convinced of.

Hence may be obſerved how roughly you have handled the firſt propagators of chriſtianity: whom, if aſſertions may be admitted to paſs for arguments, you have proved

to be as honeſt a ſet of blockheads as ever were heard of: who taught they knew not what; and ſuffered ignominy, pain, and death, they ſcarcely knew why. Yet has this compoſition of ignorance and honeſty founded and eſtabliſhed ſuch a religion, as the moſt poliſhed parts of the world have embraced; and which the moſt inveterate enemies to virtue, with all the artillery of Deiſm, have not been able to overturn; calculated to inform the meaneſt capacities, yet important enough to engage the ſtudies and win the admiration of men of the greateſt abilities. After theſe uncandid invectives againſt the firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity, it would be idle to expect that the doctrines they promulgated will fare better in your hands. A little dabbling in divinity is a dangerous thing; and, like a little ſmattering in poetry, claims the friendly admonition, "to drink "deep, or taſte not." Your talents as a divine will appear from your critique on the two following paſſages.

All

* *All policy he diſclaims in expreſs words, ſaying,* "*my kingdom is not of this world:*" *that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind.* Falſe gloſſes and a wilful perverſion of an author's meaning are the laſt wretched ſhifts to which recourſe is had in ſupport of an indefenſible cauſe: but the inference you endeavour to draw from the above paſſage, viz. that therefore his doctrine is *againſt* civil policy, will by no means follow even from the forced interpretation you have yourſelf annexed to the words. In order to arrive at the true ſenſe and meaning of a doubtful paſſage, your method I preſume is carefully to compare it with the context, and to conſider the main ſcope and general drift of the author. By this rule let the paſſage before us be tried. The Jews, that they might the more eaſily effect their wicked purpoſe, and procure the death of Jeſus, laboured to render him ſuſpected by Pilate of ſedition and

* Origin of Evil, p. 201.

innovation in the ſtate, as ſetting himſelf up for King in oppoſition to the Emperor. Pilate endeavoured by ſeveral indirect queſtions, to come at the truth of theſe inſinuations from his own mouth. "*Thy own* nation, "ſaid he, hath delivered thee unto me." Which artifice Jeſus obſerving, directly anſwered him, "*My* kingdom is not of this "world: if my kingdom were of this world, "then would my ſervants fight that I ſhould "not be delivered into the hands of the "Jews." That is, I have indeed a kingdom, which I do not deny having profeſſed to eſtabliſh: but, as I always inculcated, it is not a kingdom of this Preſent world, nor any way tends to cauſe diſturbance in the government. For if it had, my ſervants would have fought, &c.

I am ſorry to find you not leſs unhappy in your application of the paſſage next cited: †*Think not that I come to ſend peace on the*

* Origin of Evil, p. 202.

earth,

earth, &c. The contents of the chapter in which theſe words occur, are the inſtructions which Chriſt gives his Apoſtles upon ſending them forth into the world on the Grand Errand to which they were appointed. He forewarns them of the difficulties they muſt encounter, and the evils they had to ſtruggle with in their promulgation of the Goſpel; that when thoſe evils did overtake them, they might from their fore-knowledge and expectation of them, bear them with the greater conſtancy and firmer reſolution. "Think not, *ſays he*, that I am come to "ſend peace on earth, &c. That is: Do not perſuade yourſelves that you may avoid a moſt ſevere trial of your conſtancy; do not expect that the world will entertain a religion ſo deſtructive of luxury, eaſe, and pleaſure, and ſo oppoſite to men's natural luſts and appetites, as is this I come to ſettle, with an implicit reſignation to it; in the love and peaceableneſs of it. By no means: but on the contrary, to ſee you ſacrifice your

own

own eaſe and domeſtic happineſs to the public cauſe of virtue and religion; to ſee you engage yourſelves in unneceſſary troubles and afflictions, when you might have enjoyed peace and ſatisfaction at home, will exaſperate your friends and relations more particularly againſt you, and your bittereſt enemies ſhall be they of your own houſehold. This I humbly conceive to be the true meaning of the paſſage; which reſpected the Apoſtles and firſt converts with their connections, and bore no reference to future ages.

Upon theſe ſuppoſed imperfections in all religions, the Chriſtian not excepted, it is entertaining to obſerve how dexterouſly you preſs into your ſervice another argument in proof of the general imperfection of human nature. But the truth of thoſe ſuppoſed imperfections, as far as we have proceeded, appearing weak and groundleſs, this argument of courſe falls to the ground. Exulting however

ever in the diſcovery of imperfections, which exiſt not but in your own imagination, how triumphant your exclamation! * *From what inſcrutable ſource do all theſe imperfections derive their exiſtence?* Some ſource aſtoniſhing indeed, and remote from ordinary underſtandings, yet not altogether *inſcrutable*. Since it it ſeems that Omnipotence has to you committed the keys of knowledge: has graciouſly vouchſafed to unravel to you all his myſterious plan of diſpenſing to us: has to you accounted, why he has attributed to mankind juſt reaſon enough to make them miſerable, and juſt enough religion to enable them to worſhip him in the darkneſs of ignorance and error. How eaſy do the moſt abſtruſe matters appear to us, when once explained; and how ſtrange it ſeems, that no one before you ſhould have hit upon this lucky conceit! "That † man is na-

* Origin of Evil, p. 160. † Ibid. p. 162.

"turally

" turally imperfect, and therefore incapable
" of receiving a perfect religion."

It is neceſſary again and again to remind you, that perfection is a term merely relative; and therefore it may juſtly be aſked, what degree of perfection is here intended. As to abſolute perfection, we do not arrogate it; neither do we aſcribe it to beings of a much ſuperior nature: it is an attribute that can only be appropriated to the Deity himſelf. All that we contend for is, what every other ſpecies of created Beings is allowed to have, perfection in our nature: which I underſtand the old ſchool axiom, *Omne ens eſt perfectum*, to ſignify.

Man is incapable of receiving a religion calculated for ſuperior Beings; but why ſhould we ſuppoſe the all-wiſe Creator propoſed for his obſervance a religion, which it was not in his power to obſerve? * Was a

* Origin of Evil, p. 211.

legiſlator

legiſlator, to uſe your own alluſion, to compoſe laws for a nurſery; they muſt be childiſh laws, I grant: but you muſt likewiſe grant, that thoſe laws would be ſo well adapted to the age and underſtanding of thoſe children, for whoſe obſervance they were intended; that neither the comprehenſion of them would be beyond the reach of their capacity, nor the obſervance of them beyond their ability. The wiſdom of the legiſlator is concerned ſo far as this.

No matter: having with all the pomp of ipſedixitiſm *aſſerted*, a much eaſier method than that of *proving*, that "Man, being "naturally imperfect, was neceſſarily inca-"pable of receiving a perfect religion," your next ſtep is, to account for ſo extraordinary a fact. And in explication of this impracticability of imparting to mankind a perfect religion, you obſerve there are but two methods by which this can be effected; either by the deductions which God empowers them to make

make by the force of natural reaſon, or by the extraordinary interpoſition of divine revelation. The firſt, after ſome pertinent reflections upon the nature of it, and thoſe difficulties that muſt neceſſarily attend it, and deductions from its known effect unaſſiſted by revelation, you conclude to be ineffectual. And in order to prove the other method equally ſo, recourſe is had to the above-mentioned hypotheſis, the imperfection of man, and in conſequence of that, his incapability of receiving a perfect religion.

It muſt be confeſſed that Omnipotence cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he has made them naturally incapable, without at the ſame time changing their natures. He cannot inſtruct a mole in aſtronomy, or an oyſter in muſic; without imparting to them faculties neceſſary for the acquiſition of thoſe ſciences: and then that is no longer a mole, nor this an oyſter. But though the nature of theſe creatures be imperfect,

perfect, yet, as was before obſerved, who doubts that they are perfect in their nature? Or, to explain myſelf more clearly, every faculty that they poſſeſs is in the higheſt degree adapted to the nature of each ſpecies, and the uſes they have occaſion to make of them.

Man, though the loweſt in the chain of intellectual beings, is yet endowed with a faculty above the brute creation, which we call reaſon. And it is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that this faculty, rightly and properly exerted, is not ſo far adequate and perfect, as to anſwer all the purpoſes it was intended for, or we have occaſion to make of it. By it we are enabled to diſcern that there is a God; which is the foundation of all religion. And indeed, that he has ordained ſuch duties, as religion requires of us, you ſeem not to deny: in that you acknowledge * *the*

* Origin of Evil, p. 198.

Chriſtian

Chriſtian religion to have ſomething ſupernatural in it. How ſevere then is the lot of mankind, who are endowed with a faculty, which enables them to diſcover that there are certain duties to be performed to God and their fellow-creatures, as neceſſary to their happineſs: yet this unenviable faculty, which, notwithſtanding it has pleaſed God explicitly to reveal himſelf to us upon thoſe points, is incapable of diſcerning what theſe duties are. For in the name of goodneſs what end does the mere knowledge that there is a religion ſerve; if our faculties are abſolutely incapable of knowing what that religion is, and wherein it conſiſts? For my own part, I have more extenſive ideas of the divine goodneſs, and the capacity of the human mind.

But that a matter of ſuch importance may not depend upon my ideas, or even, more enlarged, more improved as they may be, on your own; let us reſt the truth upon fact,

and

and not ſurmiſe: let us examine, whether the religion, which confeſſedly appears to have the the faireſt pretenſions to be a perfect religion, be really defective in thoſe general points, which you have eſtabliſhed as the true criteria of perfection: *Univerſality*, *Authenticity*, *Perſpicuity*, and *Policy*.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

WHEN I hear your ſo warm profeſſions of zeal for the intereſts of a religion, that wants Univerſality, Authenticity, Perſpicuity, and Polity; I muſt either doubt your ſincerity, or confeſs myſelf at a loſs to account for the principles you act on. Want of *Univerſality* is a paltry objection of long ſtanding, which the enemies of revelation have piouſly tranſmitted from one to another, as a fort never to be given up. Its futility hath been ſufficiently expoſed; but it hath ſtill the air of an objection; and, as with thoſe to whom it may appear new, it may appear with ſome weight, I ſuppoſe is never to be dropped. But it is on account of the *Authenticity* of Chriſtianity that we believe it, of its *Perſpicuity* that we profit by

by it, and of its correſpondence with ſound *Polity* that it is adopted, eſtabliſhed, encouraged. And did it really want Authenticity, Perſpicuity, and Polity, it would neither merit the belief, nor practice of a wiſe man, nor be any ways entitled to the protection, much leſs the encouragement of the ſtate.

By the want of Univerſality is underſtood, to uſe your own explanation, * *that whenever and wherever a religion was firſt revealed, there muſt have been times and places, in which it was not revealed.* To this aſſertion, tho' advanced as an unqueſtionable truth, a reader little diſpoſed to cavil may juſtly object: and the proof of it will be found a more difficult taſk than you ſeem to be aware of, as well as attended with ſuch ſuppoſitions as I truſt you would never aſſume. For if the world did not exiſt from all eternity, or was

* Origin of Evil, p. 212.

not univerſally peopled at the time it begun to exiſt; in confutation of both which hypotheſes we have the concurrent teſtimony of reaſon, hiſtory, and tradition: then it muſt be acknowledged at leaſt poſſible, *that a religion might be firſt revealed; when there were neither times nor ſocieties, in which it was not revealed.* Nor is ſuch a thing only barely *poſſible*; but I am authoriſed by hiſtory to think, that there was a religion imparted to the firſt man †. Reaſon too ſeems to confirm me in this opinion: elſe how ſhall we account for thoſe various religions, or rather thoſe various modes of religion, which in a ſhort time ſo univerſally diffuſed themſelves through all ſocieties on the earth: unleſs we allow them to have been the outlines or ſhadows of the religion originally imparted to mankind, depraved and corrupted from its ancient purity; the conſequence of its having no other foundation, than the natural

† See Butler's Anal.

impulſe

impulſe of conſcience, and the inſtability and variableneſs of tradition.

If then we enquire into the nature of that original religion, it is not unreaſonable to take our account from the moſt ancient hiſtory extant, which is the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation. According to which we find, that in the days of the firſt man the Sabbath was appointed, Marriage was inſtituted, and Prayer and Adoration were made to the Deity. Here is plainly the ſubſtance of that religion, the Perfecter and Finiſher of which, from the beginning of time, was promiſed: he, *whoſe heel ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head.* For the end of Chriſt's coming was not to aboliſh the old and fundamental religion, but to perfect it: he came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it. Hence then the chriſtian religion appears to be nothing new, no novel ſyſtem, no other than the perfection of that religion, originally imparted to mankind; while there exiſted neither times nor

ſocieties in which it was not publiſhed. And thus will it, without any falſe gloſſes or forced conſtructions, bear the teſt of Univerſality, for which you contend. Nor is it unworthy to obſerve how, by a train of providential diſpenſations, the Divine Being continued gradually to clear up that religion from its original obſcurity; and encreaſe the faint glimmering he had at firſt afforded, by ſending at various periods, patriarchs, prophets, and holy men of old, to prepare the world for a reception of that light which the Sun of Brightneſs diffuſed, when the fullneſs of time was come *.

But if you contend for an univerſality of religion in a more unlimited ſenſe than this; if your meaning be, that an univerſal religion is that which muſt have been alike revealed to all men, and at all times: the argument, which is taken from the juſtice of

* See Diſcourſe on Conſcience.

God,

God, proceeds upon a falſe foundation, and deſtroys itſelf by proving too much. For by the ſame way of arguing, may we not arraign the juſtice of the Deity in affording to the poor wretches in Hudſon's Bay ſcarce the mere neceſſaries of ſubſiſtence, whilſt on Italy and other happy parts of the globe he hath dealt out with a liberal hand not only all the neceſſaries, but all the comforts and elegancies of life? Why has his providence permitted the knowledge of arts and ſciences to illumine Europe in ſo diſtinguiſhed a manner; whilſt the Africans are in a great meaſure as ignorant, barbarous, and uncivilized as the very ſavages in their deſarts? And to carry the argument ſtill further, Why is one man ſuffered to labour under the preſſure of miſery, infamy and want; and another equally or perhaps more undeſerving of the bleſſings of providence, permitted to enjoy affluence, pleaſure, and eſteem? Theſe things are obvious to the ſenſes, and therefore ſpeak for themſelves: or he, who can deny God

the power to grant advantages to one man above another in any one reſpect, would be ready to deny him the ſame power in all reſpects whatever.

The truth is, if we look through the world, we ſhall find that an equal diſtribution of the goods, as they are termed, of nature or of fortune, is not the method God has choſe in diſpenſing to mankind: but he has afforded them different natural endowments, as well as different opportunities of improving them. And yet notwithſtanding theſe ſeeming inequalities in his various diſpenſations to mankind; he, who is all perfection, muſt be infinitely juſt.

In ſhort, there lies in this reſpect the very ſame objection againſt the religion of nature, as againſt revelation; the want of univerſality being equally objectible to the one as the other. All men's capacities are not equal; ſome are endued with a quicker

quicker underſtanding and more ready perception of things than others; capable of diſtinguiſhing truth from falſhood more clearly; and from thence derive great advantages in the exerciſe of thoſe duties they ſo diſtinctly diſcern, over men of ſlower parts and inferior abilities. The argument therefore can really prove no more than this; that there will be a time, when all thoſe ſeeming partialities will be accounted for, and the ways of God fully juſtified * to man ‡.

The authenticity of the ſcriptures has, by able and learned men, been ſo fully and clearly proved, that I ſhall not preſume to enter farther into this argument, than is abſolutely neceſſary to remove the objections you have

* See Diſcourſe on Conſcience.

‡ If the Enquirer would ſee this point more fully treated, than the brevity propoſed in theſe Letters admits; I refer him to Dr. Law's "Conſiderations on "the Theory of Religion."

ſtarted

ſtarted againſt it. The main ſtreſs of which ſeems to reſt upon this aſſertion: "that "granting a man to be inſpired, yet it "ſeems utterly impracticable, that he ſhould "ever produce indubitable credentials of a "divine commiſſion to others, who are un-"inſpired *." That we may not diſpute about words, it will not be amiſs to come to an explanation of terms.

By inſpiration then I ſuppoſe I am to underſtand a divine conveyance of certain ſupernatural truths to the mind ‡. Now the end of all inſpiration, and ſome end it muſt have, is to enforce the belief of thoſe truths, with the promulgation of which the inſpired perſon is charged. If therefore this divine commiſſion be by nature incapable of being made appear to all thoſe for whoſe good and happineſs it was deſigned and promulgated; this gift of inſpiration ſerves no purpoſe;

* Origin of Evil, p. 913.

‡ See Diſcourſe on Inſpiration.

the

the conferring of it upon any perſon is unneceſſary; and therein God conſequently acts in vain: which is an aſſertion ſo wild and extravagant, as every act of reaſon, and every tenet in philoſophy diſclaim.

The queſtion then is, How are we to know when any man is inſpired? When I ſee a perſon perform things which are infinitely beyond the ordinary operations of nature: when I ſee ſickneſs and diſeaſe flee before him; whoſe touch reſtores ſight to the blind; who by his word commands the lame to walk, and even revives the dead: ſuch a perſon I muſt conclude to be ſome way ſuper-naturally empowered. Dæmons indeed, for aught I can aſſert againſt their power, may poſſibly have permiſſion and authority to enable men to perform theſe or the like works. But when I ſee theſe works wrought in confirmation of, and to ſupport a more compleat ſyſtem, of virtue and morality, than the greateſt philoſophers

ſophers and wiſeſt legiſlators were ever able to compoſe: a ſyſtem, which, whilſt it forms the manners, irradiates the mind with ſo clear truths, that the greateſt lights of human reaſon were comparatively but ſo many faint and glimmering lamps, which ſerved rather to amuſe the mind, than to inform it; to baniſh the gloom and horrors of diſſolution, rather than to preſent us with a clear proſpect of immortality: When this is the caſe, I will not heſitate to pronounce that perſon divinely inſpired: and as ſuch, of right to command my aſſent to the truth of thoſe doctrines he profeſſed to teach.

I muſt here take the liberty to remind you of a note, I find in your laſt edition, which, when you ſee the conſequence of the conceſſion there made, you will probably think proper to retract. *A ſincere belief in the divine authority of Chriſt's miſſion, you

* Origin of Evil, p. 119.

allow,

allow, was indiſpenſibly required by him in all his diſciples. Be ſo good then as to tell us, how this faith was to be propagated; how men were to receive full conviction of the divine authority of Chriſt's miſſion? For you aſſert in the paſſage before us, that tho' a man may poſſibly know when he himſelf is inſpired; yet that he ſhould ever produce indubitable credentials of a divine commiſſion to others, who are uninſpired, ſeems utterly impracticable. The argument methodized will run thus: Chriſt required of his diſciples, a ſincere belief in the divine authority of his miſſion; but no man can produce indubitable credentials of a divine commiſſion; therefore Chriſt required a ſincere belief in that, of which it was not in his power to afford them conviction. Poſſeſt of a faith ſo ready, as not to require ſufficient grounds of belief, you may be a Mahometan, a Pagan, or what you pleaſe, with the ſame praiſes with which you ſo earneſtly boaſt yourſelf a Chriſtian. Surely

you

you will not anſwer me ſo abſurdly, as by ſaying, that by *indubitable credentials* you meaned mathematical demonſtration.

The other part of your argument alludes to the diſtance of time ſince the tranſaction of thoſe facts under conſideration. But this argument, was it to be admitted as ſuch, would prove equally ſtrong and concluſive againſt our aſſenting to any of the beſt atteſted and moſt univerſally acknowledged facts that are reported in hiſtory. It is true, hiſtory is not capable of mathematical demonſtration. It cannot be ſo demonſtratively proved, that Julius Cæſar was ſtabbed in the Senate-houſe, or Richard the IIId. ſlain in Boſworth field, as that the three angles of every triangle are equal to two right ones: yet I believe the aſcertainment of thoſe facts, as firmly as I do the demonſtration of this. And wherever the teſtimony of all hiſtorians, who have recorded any fact, is general and concurrent: the circumſtances

of

of facts thus repreſented, I think, I may, without the imputation of credulity, reſt perſuaded of; and cannot without incurring the cenſure of obſtinate and dangerous ſcepticiſm, deny.

But when, beſides the concurrent teſtimony of all who have treated on any point, it happens that ſuch their accounts were publiſhed, whilſt the eye-witneſſes of thoſe facts were moſtly living; and amongſt perſons, who, had they been falſe, were both intereſted and diſpoſed to prove the falſity of them, obtained ſuch univerſal credit, that no cotemporary writer has denied, or even queſtioned the truth of them; they have then all the marks of truth, of which hiſtory is capable; and what was true ſeventeen hundred years ago, muſt be equally ſo now.

That facts are liable to be miſrepreſented by prejudice and ſelf-intereſt I readily allow; allow too, if you pleaſe, that matters of religion

gion are more expoſed to ſuch miſrepreſentations than things of more ordinary concern. But I believe prejudice and ſelf-intereſt have leſs aſcendency over the minds of thoſe who have appeared in defence of Chriſtianity, than of thoſe who have declared themſelves againſt it. Let the religion be true or falſe, unleſs the advocate for it be thoroughly perſuaded of the truth of it, why ſhould he labour to involve poſterity in error. He manifeſtly declares, that he does not believe on the bare authority of thoſe who believed before him; in that he puts the truth of his faith to the teſt of reaſon and argument. The dignified prieſt enjoys the benefit and dignity which reſult from his profeſſion, if that religion be falſe; and what can he do more, be it ever ſo true? How therefore is his temporal intereſt concerned in the truth of it; or what ſelfiſh prejudices has ſuch a man to engage with? But on the contrary, a religion which hangs like a clog upon bad men's conſciences, which reſtrains their pleaſures,

ſures, and thwarts their appetites and inclinations, will naturally poſſeſs them with ſtrong prejudices againſt it. Accordingly we find, that thoſe of the moſt profligate and libertine lives are generally its greateſt adverſaries. Their lives make them wiſh it to be falſe: and it is an eaſy tranſition, from wiſhing to believing.

Its ſpeculative doctrines likewiſe, you obſerve, muſt want perſpicuity: and not only the ſpeculative points of a divinely inſtituted religion, but alſo thoſe of nature are beyond our comprehenſion. I cannot tell how the ſoul acts upon the body; but that it does ſo act, is a matter therefore not leſs true. So I am told, that the dead ſhall be raiſed incorruptible, and I believe it: how they are to be thus raiſed, is not explained to me; nor am I ſollicitous to know. And when you will condeſcend to demonſtrate in what manner ſpirit acts upon matter; I will, in return for that ſecret, engage to illuſtrate any

the moſt abſtruſe and ſpeculative doctrines in the Chriſtian Religion. There cannot lie any real objection againſt it, becauſe ſome of its ſpeculative doctrines are exalted above human reaſon; ſo long as there is nothing contradictory, nothing repugnant to reaſon in the whole ſcheme of Chriſtianity. So long as its practical duties are clear and obvious to the meaneſt capacities; matters of ſpeculation it may include, which are beyond the reach of the moſt refined reaſoners clearly to explain: probably intended as an inducement to men of learning and abilities, to employ their talents on a ſubject of ſo great and general concern. Man is by nature curious and aſpiring; fond of what is abſtruſe, and apt to deſpiſe things that are plain and eaſy, merely becauſe they are ſo:

Tranſvolat in medio poſita, & fugientia captat.

Objects the more remote they lye from the pale of human knowledge, the more ſtrongly

ſtrongly engage our attention, and excite our ambitious reſearches. Suppoſing Chriſtianity comprized nothing but a ſet of plain practical precepts; might not that be a reaſon for our faſtidious nature to reject the divinity of it? And if ſo, does not that very argument, which the Freethinker alledges againſt the divinity of the Chriſtian Religion, tend ſtrongly to enforce the truth of it? Surely I am not to refuſe my aſſent to all ſpeculative points, which the ſcanty line of human reaſon cannot reach; when it is required of me by the precepts of a religion, the divinity of which that ſame reaſon evinces by many other clear and inconteſtable proofs.

Human reaſon can never enable me to comprehend all myſteries; yet may it direct me, when there is ſufficient grounds for my belief of them. In ſhort, what is above my reaſon, it requires no great degree of credulity to believe on the authority of a

divine revelation: and to no point, that contradicts my reaſon, does ſcripture require my aſſent.

But then its practical precepts are ſo far from falling under any charge of obſcurity, are ſo clear and obvious, that he who runs may read and comprehend them. And nothing but a ſtrong affectation of ſingularity could have betrayed you into an aſſertion, to uſe your own words, ſo very *extraordinary*, as "that even its practical and moral precepts "muſt be likewiſe obſcure*." And then without offering the ſhadow of an argument in ſupport of ſo falſe and arbitrary an aſſertion, you gravely ſet yourſelf to account for the neceſſity of it. And this you endeavour upon the ſtrength of an hypotheſis elſewhere laid down, *viz.* "That Omnipotence could "not prevent moral evil from coming "into the world." Suppoſing Omnipotence

* Origin of Evil, p. 219.

could

could not have prevented Evil from coming into the world; you will however allow me, that he could have prevented *ſome* of the Evil that is introduced from coming into the world; for there are many Evils both natural and moral, that cannot be called eſſential to our nature: Upon your plan then be ſo kind as to anſwer me why Omnipotence did not. Or draw your line, and tell me how much Evil Omnipotence could have prevented, and how much he could not. *Could* not Omnipotence for inſtance have prevented the introduction of many diſeaſes, which till of late years never made their appearance in the world: *Could* not the ſame infinite Power have prevented the introduction of many unnatural crimes: neither the one, nor the other, appearing at all eſſential to human nature? Upon your plan* how is the introduction of Evils, which Omnipotence could have prevented, ac-

* Origin of Evil, p. 89.

counted for? Why truly, by a ſingular perſuaſion of your own, that there is ſomething conducive to pleaſure in the abſtract nature of pain: a connection or dependance altogether inexplicable, nay, as you yourſelf acknowledge, *inconceiveable* *.

In truth, to aſſert that Omnipotence *cannot* do a thing, which implies no contradiction, is a language, to which I am not accuſtomed, and know not how to conform. If, to aſſert that Omnipotence could not prevent moral Evil from coming into the world, be not ſetting bounds to Omnipotence, I know not what is. Omnipotence indeed cannot work contradictions: It cannot make a line at the ſame time a ſtright line and a curve; nor two things, at the ſame time, equal and unequal; it cannot at the ſame time exclude moral Evil from the world, and ſuffer it to be introduced. Yet this inability ariſes not

* Origin of Evil, p. 91, and 92.

from

from any limitted power in God, but from the neceſſity of things. He can make a curved line ſtreight, and again, a ſtreight line he can make a curve; by deſtroying the equality, he can make two equal things unequal; and he could as eaſily have excluded moral evil from the world, as permitted it to be introduced. And the reaſon why it was ſuffered to be introduced, can never be, that it *could* not, but that it was *better* not to have been excluded.

However, granting the truth of your hypotheſis, if your argument be reduced into form, we ſhall find it ſtand thus: "God, "who could not prevent moral evil from "coming into the world, can much leſs be "ſuppoſed able to extirpate it, when once "introduced; therefore all precepts of mo-"ral virtue that he can communicate to "man muſt be obſcure:" or rather, in my humble opinion, therefore all ſuch precepts muſt be imperfect: or indeed, if any conclu-

ſion can be properly drawn from theſe premiſes, it muſt be this, "that therefore all "precepts of virtue are abſolutely vain." From hence may be obſerved, how inconcluſive are the reaſonings of ingenious men; when out of an affected ſingularity they give too great ſcope to the flight of their own vague fancies, and would appear to think more deeply than all the world that went before them: who, by endeavouring to ſoar too high in ſearch of light, are moſt apt to loſe themſelves amidſt the clouds of error.

The laſt general objection is, its want of policy; by which, as you inform us, is meant *, that it does not preſcribe rules for the government of ſtates and empires; a point in which I have the ſatisfaction to find myſelf entirely of your opinion; neither does it eſtabliſh rules, or afford us any directions

* Origin of Evil, p. 221.

for

for the conducting of fleets and armies. No man in his ſenſes ever ſuppoſed Chriſtianity to comprehend all arts and ſciences. Religion is one thing; policy is another. This preſcribes regulations for the government of ſtates and communities; and that profeſſes to direct us in our duty to God, ourſelves, and others.

In general, policy is oppoſed to barbariſm, as religion is to vice. All therefore that can be required of religion in this view is, that it claſh not with civil polity: and no defect can with any propriety be imputed to it, becauſe it includes no rules of government; ſo long as its precepts go hand in hand with ſuch principles of policy, as if ſtrictly adhered to cannot fail to render a people flouriſhing and great. And that ſuch is the nature of the religion under conſideration, is one of thoſe plain truths that need no proof. A religion, the precepts of which tend to make us affectionate parents,

dutiful

dutiful children, faithful friends, and worthy citizens, muſt promote virtue; and virtue, in ſpite of all refinements on Machiavelian policy, will make us brave. It has been prettily obſerved, that the Greeks and Romans expreſſed virtue and bravery indifferently by the ſame word: thereby implying the neceſſary and inſeparable connection between them. And indeed we ſhall always find virtue and true courage in the ſame breaſt; they are congenial, and will ever be inſeparable companions *.

If it be indeed true, that Venality, Perfidy, Corruption, and a general encouragement of Profligacy and Vice, be the principles of government beſt calculated to promote the greatneſs and proſperity of a nation; the principles of Chriſtianity are moſt

* ——— ——— *Curius quid ſentit, & ambo*
Scipiadæ? Quid Fabricius, maneſque Camilli?
Quid Cremeræ legio, & cunctis conſumpta Juventus,
Tot bellarum animæ? Juv. Sat. II.

incompatible

incompatible with the rules and principles of ſound policy. But on the contrary, if upon a ſtrict and impartial enquiry it ſhould appear, that in whatever ſtate the duties of morality were moſt ſtrictly obſerved, and theſe oppoſite principles were leaſt prevailing; proportionably happier were the people, more formidable and independent the ſtate: If the ruin of Athens, Sparta, and Rome be by their own hiſtorians aſcribed to the malignant influence of ſuch principles as theſe: as well the introduction of ſuch principles, as the encouragement of them when introduced, muſt be impolitic. For it is an axiom as true in politics as in philoſophy, "that a ſimilarity of cauſes will produce "ſimilar effects."

From this view of things then it appears, that corruption, venality, and a total diſſipation of manners, are not more contrary to the precepts of our religion, than the rules of ſound policy: conſequently that religion, which

which in every article fundamentally combats thoſe vices, and diſcourages them, muſt conduce to the good of the ſtate. And therefore, though it does not immediately preſcribe rules of government; yet as it cooperates with, and enforces principles of the beſt and ſureſt policy, it may be deemed ſtrictly political; and even on prudential and temporary motives, deſerves to be encouraged.

Principles of government founded on an encouragement of vice, however warmly recommended, however occaſionally uſeful to a weak or profligate miniſtry, muſt always be prejudicial to the ſtate. Such arts are at beſt but a bad varniſh to hide real defects, which, like the rouge on a faded face, by a preſent addition of falſe and adventitious charms deludes the eye of the ſuperficial admirer, yet in reality poiſons the beauties it is intended to enhance, and ſecretly ſaps the conſtitution.

The

The judicious author of the *Preſent State of Europe* lays down this maxim: to uſe his own words; "As a point of very great "conſequence in politics, That religious "principles are much more capable of ſuſ- "taining and ſupporting a firm and deter- "mined courage, than either political no- "tions or views of intereſt. Which ſhould "induce ſtateſmen to be very cautious of "running down religion in general; that "can never have any better effect, than cor- "rupting and daſtardizing ſuch as are delu- "ded into thoſe looſe ſentiments: for this "is an infallible maxim, That he who does "not think himſelf accountable to God, "will never do any thing worthy of a man."

Now upon ſuppoſition of a religion being defective in the four points above-mentioned, which you have eſtabliſhed as the teſt of perfection; your concluſion is reaſonable: that it muſt ſoon be corrupted. But I truſt there is a religion, to which thoſe marks of imperfection

fection are unfairly attributed; I firmly believe the reformed religion of this land to be that religion, which was promulgated by Christ and his Apoſtles; and that this religion will appear to a candid and judicious mind able to bear the ſtricteſt examination; will acquire new luſtre from the niceſt ſcrutiny, and by freſh evidences of its truth, come forth with greater clearneſs, like real gold from the refiner's fire.

A writer, leſs fond of paradoxes than yourſelf, would never have ſet himſelf to account for the neceſſary corruption of a religion upon principles, which, if any principles can, are moſt indiſputably beſt calculated to preſerve it pure. "* When a religion, ſay "you, is believed to be divine, it will be "received; when received, ſupported; and "to ſupport it, an order of men muſt "be maintained to explain its precepts,

* Origin of Evil, p. 180.

"and

" and enforce the practice of them: which " amounts to a national eſtabliſhment." Why really theſe means do appear to the groſſneſs of common ſenſe moſt effectual for preſerving the purity of a religion. A religion put upon this footing will be leſs liable either to be miſtaken by ignorance, or wilfully perverted; than when truſted to every man's particular humour or fancy; and perhaps the partiality of ſome darling vice. As a veſſel, that has a pilot to direct its courſe is more likely to proceed aright, than one that is committed to the wildneſs and caprice of every wind that blows. In this manner thought the wiſeſt legiſlators in all ages; and to preſerve the purity of that religion they eſteemed beſt, they made it national. But common ſenſe is fit only for common folks; and the wiſeſt legiſlators are mere dolts in reaſoning, when ſet in competition with modern freethinkers. For it ſeems, as ſoon as a religion is thus eſtabliſhed, it immediately becomes ſo intimately

mately connected with the private intereſts of thoſe who are maintained to propagate its doctrines, and guard its purity; that they will *therefore* —— be the more likely to corrupt it.

Excellent concluſion! No: before it becomes eſtabliſhed, when the prieſts are paid according to the number of believers they can procure; bad men may then be tempted to make their religion ſubſervient to their worldly concerns; may ſay and unſay; and compaſs ſea and land to gain one proſelyte. But from the minute that religion becomes nationally eſtabliſhed, theſe ſelfiſh motives for perverting it are at an end. He, whoſe office it is to preſerve it pure, and who enjoys the advantages reſulting from ſuch an employ; labours againſt his own intereſt in attempting to corrupt it. Since as long as it continues in it's original purity, ſo long may he reaſonably hope to remain poſſeſſed of the emoluments annexed to his profeſſion.

ſion. He muſt therefore be knave and fool, who either himſelf endeavours to corrupt it, or does not, as far as in him lies, prevent the ſiniſter views of thoſe who would. For when once corrupted, it may with the more eaſe and ſucceſs be attacked; and the more open it lies to attacks, in the more danger is it of being demoliſhed: and with a new Form of Religion, a new Order of Prieſts muſt of courſe ſucceed.

Thus, Sir, have I followed you ſtep by ſtep, as far as the ſhadow of an argument is advanced. All beyond is declamation: Which if levelled, as is ſeemingly profeſſed, againſt the church of *Rome*: let us take the ſcriptures for our guide, and we ſhall find that the doctrines of that church are not only not authorized by, but are incompatible with, the Goſpel; and that therefore the doctrines, which it profeſſes, are not

the doctrines of Chriſtianity, but of an unwieldy polity, which borrowed the pretext of religion for its ſupport. For as the moſt perfect things may be corrupted by power and pride; ſo alſo was Chriſtianity itſelf. But there is in truth ſomething ſo irreſiſtible, as will in the end force its way through all the errors, that knavery and folly can throw around it.

So the pure limpid ſtream, when foul with ſtains
Of ruſhing torrents, and deſcending rains,
Works itſelf clear. ——— ———

ADDISON.

And indeed the reformation of our religion carries with it, like its original propagation, the moſt evident ſtamp of divinity. To go about to prove either the one or the other, is beyond the purpoſe of this letter: which I cannot better conclude, than in the words of a learned and reſpectable writer,

writer, who on the caſe in point thus expreſsly declares himſelf*. "The accidental occaſion whereupon, the ſlender means "whereby, the low and abject condition "of the perſon by whom ſo good a work "was ſet on foot, which in our adverſaries begets contempt, fills me with wonder, and is the very ſame objection the "inſolent Pagans firſt caſt at Chriſt and his "Diſciples."

I have the honour to be, Sir, &c.

* Sir *Thomas Browne*'s Relig. Medici.

THREE
DISCOURSES.

DISCOURSE I.

On CONSCIENCE.

ROMANS II. 14. and 15.

When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, theſe having not the law are a law unto themſelves: which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another.

TO ſuch extravagant height did the more rigid among the Jews, carry their contempt of the nations of the world; that they denied the Gentiles, who were

without the law, to have either virtue or vice: whatever theſe did, they ſuppoſed was done by them not of choice or election, but by nature; and that therefore there was no reaſon why they ſhould be rewarded for the one, or puniſhed for the other. To this overweening notion of the Jews the paſſage before us ſeems particularly to allude. Though, ſays the apoſtle, they are deſtitute of the light of revelation, yet are they not without a rule of conduct; though they have no written law, they have a law graven on their hearts; by which in general caſes they underſtand, and are conſcious to themſelves what is good and evil, and therefore are juſt objects of ſalvation and condemnation; capable of rewards, if they obſerve this law, and liable to puniſhment, if they act againſt it. *When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, theſe having not the law, are a law unto themſelves: which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conſcience alſo bearing*

ing witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while accuſing or excuſing one another. Or perhaps rather, *their thoughts the mean while* reſpectively to themſelves *accuſing or elſe excuſing them.* "Reſpectively to themſelves," or "each "one's to himſelf," ſeems in this place to be the proper import of the words μεταξυ αλληλων.

From theſe words I will take occaſion to enquire into the nature of the principle, by the apoſtle here ſtiled Conſcience; which will lead me to conſider in the ſecond place, how far it is or is not a full and ſufficient rule of action.

Conſcience, according to the common acceptation of the word, is underſtood to ſignify the judgment of a man's mind upon the moral rectitude or iniquity of his actions: but the checks or impulſe of Conſcience frequently precede any ſuch operation of reaſon: ſome internal monitor frequently ſtops us ſhort in the career of evil, and it is not till in conſequence of ſuch checks

checks, that we begin to look about us, to reaſon, and deliberate upon the fitneſs of what we are going to engage in. Conſcience therefore ſhould ſeem to imply ſomething more than the uſual explications attribute to it; ſomething, that acts in concert with right reaſon, but is nevertheleſs independent of it. For if the caſe was otherwiſe, if Conſcience was nothing elſe than the determination of reaſon in judging upon moral obligations; the moſt acute and ſubtle reaſoner would always be the man of niceſt and moſt feeling Conſcience. Whereas the fact is frequently found to be the very reverſe of this: reaſon often exerts itſelf with vigour and acuteneſs in men of corrupt morals and the moſt depraved appetites; where the voice of Conſcience is ſilenced, or at beſt but faintly heard. And on the contrary, the conſcience of the rude unlettered man will ſometimes ſtart at the commiſſion of an evil action, which the man of refined reaſon will either overlook, or with the ſubtle device of ſome nice diſtinctions gloſs

gloſs over and palliate. Reaſon is the inveſtigation of truth; Conſcience, as the word ſeems etymologically to imply, an innate knowledge of it. Reaſon acts by making compariſons, forming judgment upon them, and by a long train of thought: Conſcience operates inſtantaneouſly; without any laborious deductions of reaſon, directs, approves, and chides. It is as it were a ray of intuitive knowledge, that * image of the Deity, after which man was originally created; a particle of divine light, which by the great and general depravation of human nature has ſince the firſt fair original been much obſcured, but is not even yet intirely extinguiſhed. Thoſe general conceptions of right and wrong, naturally ingendered in the human mind, and implicated with the

* Agreeably to what is here obſerved, the apoſtle ſtiles the revival of the old law of nature in the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt, the renewal of the image of God in man. Col. iii. 10, *Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

frame

frame and conſtitution of it, ſtill influence it, though with various and diminiſhed powers: they form that principle, which ſtill continues to upbraid and rebuke a man with an evil action; and to impart the moſt ſenſible ſatisfaction on the performance of a good one.

This principle then we may ſuppoſe was at firſt implanted in human nature, to aſſiſt our reaſon in the inveſtigation of moral obligations; to bear witneſs to, and enforce it. And the united powers of Reaſon and Conſcience, as they were afforded us, whereby to regulate our conduct, and to direct us in the diſcharge of our duty, it is natural to ſuppoſe were abundantly ſufficient to the end, for which our gracious Creator intended them. It is juſt to preſume they were at the creation, and before the fall a ſufficient ſtandard and rule of action, had man duly attended to them. It is reaſonable to conceive without indulging our fancy too far, that could any doubt have ariſen

ariſen in the mind, in regard to moral conduct, Reaſon would have diſtinguiſhed ſo readily, clearly and impartially, and the verdict of Conſcience been ſo pure and untainted, ſo forceful and expreſs, that a juſt determination would have been as early as the propoſal. If a man turn his eyes inward, and look impartially into his own breaſt, he will there perceive ſomething putting him in mind of what he ſhould or ſhould not do, and afterwards accuſing or elſe excuſing him accordingly as he has or has not done it. And from what he feels paſſing within himſelf at this period, and in this corrupted ſtate of our nature, he may in ſome meaſure conceive how clearly and forcibly this principle might act in its original vigour; before the violent inroads of paſſion, and the general ſpread of vice had reverſed our nature; and reduced us from a ſet of beings, created little inferior to angels, in many inſtances beneath the level of brutes.

This

This was that principle, or, as the apoſtle terms it, law, which was originally afforded Adam, whereby to regulate his conduct; and for tranſgreſſing againſt the dictates of which, he incurred the fatal puniſhment of his ſin. It was to the virtuous heathen his monitor, his guide, his God. It was to every man, if fairly conſulted, and duly attended to, the beſt of caſuiſts, and the moſt faithful friend. But in a courſe of years vice made ſo large ſtrides into the world, that this law, though in the minds of ſome few it might ſhine with diſtinguiſhed luſtre, with the generality of men became *almoſt* obliterated. In ſhort, it was to *be, that offences* ſhould *come*; and at length through the power of temptations, which the growing luxury of the world on every ſide held out, through the prevalency of paſſions from within, the force of habit and example from without, and the almoſt inſurmountable aſcendency of inveterate prejudices, the original light of reaſon was ſo much

much obſcured; and with it the voice of Conſcience, that was accuſtomed to attend its deciſions, either lulled aſleep, or bribed to plead againſt it; that it became no eaſy matter in all caſes to diſcern right from wrong, and good from evil: inſomuch that men, even well-deſigning men, were often betrayed to impoſe both on themſelves and others with falſe notions, and correſpondingly falſe and evil actions; to ſubſtitute *bitter for ſweet, and ſweet for bitter.* The apoſtle himſelf declares, ſpeaking in the character of a Jew, that he *had not known ſin but by the law, for he had not known luſt, except the law had ſaid, thou ſhalt not covet.* That is, we ſhould not have known ſin ſo certainly and preciſely, in all its minute branches, and latent principles, but by the law. Scarcely ſhould we have known that luſt, or irregular deſire, was a ſin, except the law had ſo expreſsly forbidden it.

Such

Such was the ſtate of mankind, when it pleaſed the Almighty to redeem them from the great ignorance and error into which they had fallen, by a revealed manifeſtation of his will. The original light of nature Moſes was ſent to revive, explain, and enforce. And a ſucceſſive train of divine delegates at different periods appeared in the world, gradually opening, and preparing mankind for that great revelation, which Chriſt himſelf came down from heaven to compleat; who therefore expreſsly affirms, that the end of his miſſion was *to fulfill the law.* Thus were the clouds of error diſperſed, and Reaſon taught again to ſhine with more than original luſtre: the law written in man's heart attending the reſult of his will and actions with a voice of accuſation or excuſe.

Strange then that this handmaid of religion, this aſſiſtant of Reaſon, ſhould be ſo frequently ſeduced from the plain dictates both of the one and the other. The man of

of the world, as it is emphatically expreſſed, *fears his Conſcience*; and then miſtakes its want of feeling for approbation. The bigot, on the other hand, maligns and perſecutes all who in practice or opinion differ from him, and thinks or feigns to think he is therein doing God ſervice. Thus from a miſinformed Conſcience proceeds the vain confidence of the ſceptic, and from the ſame corrupted ſource the pious rants of enthuſiaſm.

In enquiring farther how this principle, calculated for the beſt and nobleſt purpoſes, becomes ſo liable to be perverted, and made ſubſervient to the very worſt, I ſhall be led to conſider in the ſecond place, how far it is or is not a full and ſufficient rule of action.

We ſuppoſed this law of the mind, written by God himſelf on the tablet of every man's heart, to have been originally full and explicit; ſufficient to the purpoſe for which it was intended. We have alſo ſeen, that after the fall, this internal light became greatly

obſcured; and in a courſe of years, human nature verging from bad to worſe, was at length only not extinguiſhed. Hence appeared the neceſſity of ſome more certain and perfect ſtandard to walk by, and the goodneſs of our Creator in reviving the faint and glimmering light of nature with an acceſſion of light neither faint nor glimmering; which reforms the manners, while it enlarges the underſtanding; and, while it opens the nobleſt proſpect of happineſs hereafter, conducts us to it through *ways of pleaſantneſs, and paths of peace.*

But if in this corrupt ſtate of our nature, where the paſſions take the lead, men will argue, that becauſe no revelation was at firſt made, and mankind were ſuffered to continue many ages without one, therefore no revelation could ever afterwards be neceſſary; that becauſe Reaſon and Conſcience were all the rule of conduct, that was at firſt given, and muſt conſequently be ſuppoſed then to have been

been a ſufficient rule, therefore it muſt ever remain to be ſo; and from ſuch arguments are led to form their conduct on certain vague principles, which each propoſes for himſelf, derived from the biaſs of natural inclination, or the prevailing force of example: the inſufficiency of this rule, and impropriety of a conduct formed from it, will beſt appear from attending to their natural conſequences.

Every man has his darling paſſion, which uſurps a predominancy, and pleads for gratification and indulgence more powerfully than the reſt. Theſe are apt to dazzle our Reaſon, and ſeduce our Conſcience; we miſcall, we palliate, we overlook them. The man of pleaſure for inſtance calls ſenſuality the dictates of nature; and obeys thoſe dictates, as often as inclination prompts, and opportunity offers: and though he would ſtart at avarice or ingratitude, his Conſcience gives him no uneaſineſs in that point, to which his natural complection inclines him.

The miſer ſtamps upon avarice the amiable name of frugality; and, while he ſees luxury and ſenſuality in their blackeſt colours, idolizes his mammon, and, though the enemy both of God and man, perceives nothing criminal in the worſt of crimes. In theſe therefore and the like caſes right and wrong are no longer the ſame, but what is virtue with one man is with another vice; and the apparent fitneſs of things, upon which the man of reaſon is apt to lay ſo much ſtreſs, is continually altering and changing, as vague as men's various humours and caprice. And not only ſo; but this rule of action ſhall to the ſame perſons appear different at different times. The leſs progreſs men have made in vice, the more tender and delicate their conſciences are: but when they have made a larger advancement in it, their Conſciences by being frequently wounded become more callous, and the difference between right and wrong leſs ſenſibly affects them. It is the ſame in the moral

moral, as in the natural world: moral honeſty, like objects of ſight, the farther we remove from it, is the more faintly and indiſtinctly diſcerned by us.

If therefore by the aſſiſtance of our paſſions and prejudices, and other external helps which the world will afford us, we can ſo far blind our Reaſon, as firmly to perſuade ourſelves we may advance ſuch and ſuch lengths in vice without incurring guilt, and innocently indulge ourſelves in thoſe peculiar vices to which we are moſt inclined, provided we keep clear of others to which perhaps we have no inclination at all; Reaſon thus dazzled, and the paſſions triumphant, we ſhall never hear the faineſt whiſpers of Conſcience. Indeed the principle, we might call Conſcience, thus biaſſed becomes no Conſcience at all; but rather fancy, humour, or prejudice, taken up from education, intereſt, or example; all which are apt to be frequently miſtaken for Con-

ſcience; and under that fair and ſeemly diſguiſe to betray men of weak judgment, ſtrong paſſions, and heated imaginations, into the greateſt extravagancies of abſurdity and vice.

To evince the danger of ſuch miſtakes, and the neceſſity there is of being well informed how far our Conſcience may be depended upon, or not; it is ſufficient to obſerve, that whatever notions we may entertain of virtue and vice, their nature is nevertheleſs immutable, and God's judgment of them the ſame: and therefore we ſhall be accountable for the practice of them as they are, not as a perverted Conſcience may repreſent them to us.

What is apt to palm itſelf upon the mind for Conſcience, I obſerved is oftentimes no more than the prepoſſeſſion of ſome paſſion, or prejudice. And indeed were we nicely to inveſtigate the nature of a falſe and

erroneous Conſcience, and through all its devious turns and windings trace it up to its proper ſource; we ſhould ever find it ultimately flowing from ſome prevailing paſſion, from intereſt or example. Each of theſe, its charms reſpectively adapted to the mind it poſſeſſes, pleads with eloquence ſo palatable and prevailing, that Conſcience is vanquiſhed, and this new minion uſurps both its place and office: ſo that however we may deceive ourſelves, it is not in this caſe the judgment of Conſcience that acquits or condemns, but ſome vicious propenſity or prejudice, that over-rules that judgment: And Conſcience, where it is not entirely ſilenced, thus baffled and ſuperſeded in one quarter, changes the attack, and exerts all its power againſt the oppoſite vices; where no paſſion or prejudice prevails againſt it. Hence it is that we oftentimes obſerve a man laying great ſtreſs upon ſome peculiar virtues, or rather perhaps ſome external forms of virtue, excluſive of the reſt, and proportionably ve-

hement againſt particular vices. And hence too we may perhaps in ſome meaſure account for that obſervation, neither uncommon, nor unjuſt; that thoſe who make the greateſt parade of Conſcience, are frequently found in reality to have the leaſt of it. A man may *faſt twice in the week, and give tithes of all that he hath*; but if he be at the ſame time proud, cenſorious, and uncharitable, he may ſpeak peace to his Conſcience, and *thank God that he is not as other men are:* but we may collect from our Saviour's remark, that *he ſpeaks peace where there is no peace.*

Conſcience is always uniform; it comprehends virtue in all its branches: and though it may not be ſufficient at all times to guard and ſecure us againſt every attack of vice; it will never lay out its powers in ſecuring us againſt particular vices, and leave us expoſed to, and even countenance the reſt. It will never ceaſe to diſquiet and moleſt us, till we ceaſe to ſin: nor in complaiſance to paſſion

paſſion ever impoſe upon us in a fair flattering diſguiſe. Would Herod, for Inſtance, *who knew* John *to be a juſt man and holy:* who heard him gladly in ſome things, and paid great regard to his advice and direction, would he have judged himſelf obliged to ſacrifice this good counſellor, this juſt, this holy man to a raſh unguarded promiſe: unleſs Conſcience had impoſed upon him in the harlot dreſs of honour? In conſequence of his ſolemn promiſe, and regard to the reſpectable company before whom it was made, he thought himſelf bound in honour and Conſcience to commit murder, with the moſt aggravating circumſtances.

I might in farther confirmation of what has been in general advanced, deſcend to other particular inſtances, in which the ſecret ſprings of this falſe principle would appear as clearly laid open, as in the caſe juſt mentioned: might I not preſume the inſufficiency of Conſcience, as a rule of action,

tion, let and hindered as we are by the incumbrances of ſin, and the temptations that on all ſides ſo powerfully ſollicit us, fully evinced; as alſo the neceſſity of ſome fixed ſtandard, whereby to regulate a principle, otherwiſe ſo little to be depended on, ſo very vague and vain. And, after what has been already premiſed, little more need be added to point out the criterion intended. Revealed religion being now what the law of nature originally was, we may in every caſe depend upon Conſcience, regulated by the revelation which God has been pleaſed to make to us, fairly and rationally interpreted, to be a full and ſufficient rule of action. Since ſo excellent and compleat a ſyſtem of morality has Chriſt left us; that there is no duty which we ought to practiſe, nothing we ought to refrain from, but what is there clearly and expreſsly commanded or forbidden. It is from thence, and thence only, that Conſcience is to take its meaſures: ſo that as every man is bound to walk accord-

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ing to his own Conſcience, every man's Conſcience is equally bound to the direction of God's word.

It may be objected, that if divine revelation be the only full and ſufficient ſtandard by which Conſcience is to be regulated; what will become of thoſe, and how are they to act, *whom this day-ſpring from on high* hath never viſited: to which the words under conſideration are a ſufficient anſwer: Though the heathen have not the written law of God, ſtill have they an univerſal law written in their hearts; which, though leſs clear and forceful than the other, is ſtill ſufficient in general caſes to direct them in the diſcharge of their duty; though leſs purity and holineſs will be required of them, and proportionably leſs will their merit or demerit be, this their law is both ſo clear and forceful as to render them accountable for their actions; juſtly liable to puniſhment, and through the applied merits of Chriſt, capable of rewards.

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The ſum of what may be practically inferred from the above diſcourſe is, that ſince our Creator hath ſtamped upon the human mind ſo faithful a monitor, and ſo ſure a guide, if properly regulated and duly attended to, as Conſcience; it is both our intereſt and our duty, carefully to follow its dictates, and ſubmiſſively attend to its reproofs. A ſtrict regard to it will, by little and little wean us from our ſins, by the uneaſineſs and remorſe * it will on the commiſſion of vice create to us. For it is difficult to figure to ourſelves a more unhappy man than him, who has a juſt ſenſe of virtue, yet whoſe virtue is continually yielding to the

* This uneaſineſs, and remorſe of Conſcience, as it is called, which we feel upon the Commiſſion of an evil action, affords no bad argument in ſupport of the Freedom of Will and Action. For why ſhould we feel any uneaſineſs in conſequence of an action, to which we were neceſſarily determined? Remorſe is a temporary puniſhment, and oftentimes a very ſevere one. But the act muſt be free and voluntary, elſe it is no crime; and it muſt be a crime, elſe it is not in ſtrict juſtice puniſhable.

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blandiſhment and charms of vice: whoſe life is a conſtant ſucceſſion of ſinning and repenting; who hates himſelf for being the thing he is, yet wants reſolution to become otherwiſe. But when the voice of Conſcience is ſilenced, when the paſſions, originally formed in ſubſervience to reaſon have once broke from their allegiance, and uſurping dominion annul and abrogate the law written in our hearts; the ſtrongeſt barrier againſt the inroads of vice is demoliſhed, and no other defence of ſinking virtue will be left than worldly intereſt, or the dread of worldly ſhame.

Seeing then that rebellion againſt this law is ſo uneaſy to us, and inattention to it ſo dangerous; will it not abundantly recompence to us all our pains, to labour to preſerve this principle pure and undefiled; to *exerciſe ourſelves to have a Conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man?* Which is nothing leſs than what our Saviour in other

other words calls our duty to God and our neighbour; and which he affirms to compriſe the whole law, and the prophets. That this be our care, as it will be our comfort here, and our happineſs hereafter, may God of his infinite mercy grant.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE II.

On INSPIRATION.

Preached on WHITSUNDAY.

2 TIMOTHY III. 16.

All ſcripture is given by Inſpiration of God.

A Religion, that like the Chriſtian fundamentally oppoſes every kind of vice, muſt neceſſarily draw upon it the ill will of all ſuch as are engaged in vicious purſuits; accordingly the quiver of infidelity has been drained, and no ſhadow of occaſion neglected by the ſenſualiſt to cavil at its doctrines, and

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if poſſible rid his conſcience of ſo galling a yoke. Divine revelation has been conſidered as an idle dream of enthuſiaſm, all notions of Inſpiration diſputed againſt, and becauſe there have been many falſe pretences made to it, the reality of the thing has been called in queſtion: Which argues juſt as good reaſoning, as it would be, to diſpute the reality of virtue, becauſe there are in the world ſo many hypocrites.

By Inſpiration we underſtand a ſupernatural conveyance of divine truths to the mind; which, in atteſtation of the reality of it, hath been ever attended with a diſplay of miraculous powers. The particular Inſpiration which we this day commemorate, was evinced in the extraordinary profuſion of the Holy Ghoſt on the Apoſtles aſſembled at the great feaſt of Pentecoſt; and was ſufficiently diſplayed to the wondering aſſembly by the various Gifts of Tongues, with which the Apoſtles were inſtantaneouſly inſtructed.

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The fact is by the ſacred hiſtorian thus ſimply related.

At the general feaſt of Pentecoſt, when the Jews were aſſembled from all quarters of the world at Jeruſalem; a ſurpriſing ſound, like that of a mighty ruſhing wind, filled the houſe where the apoſtles were ſitting: whilſt * a kind of fiery tongues, as proper ſymbols of thoſe gifts with which they were then inſpired from on high, appeared over each of them. And the effects, that immediately followed, were fully anſwerable to thoſe figurative reſemblances, for they were inſtantaneouſly filled with the Holy Ghoſt; and expreſſed themſelves as the ſpirit dictated in ſuch variety of languages, that they could readily converſe with the Parthian, the Mede, and Elamite, in ſhort with the natives of every country in Europe, Aſia, and Africa; with each in the language of that Country in which he was born.

* Ωσει Πυρος.

Againſt the truth of this fact, however extraordinary it may appear, there can be objected no implication of impoſſibility or contradiction. There are two ways, by which a knowledge of different languages may be acquired; ordinary and extraordinary. The ordinary way of acquiring this knowledge of languages, is by converſing frequently with thoſe who underſtand them; by long ſtudy and application: The other, and extraordinary way, of attaining to it, is by an immediate divine conveyance. And who can doubt, but that He, who furniſhed us with faculties capable of learning different languages in length of time and by dint of application, can, whenever he ſees fit, convey to us the ſame degree of knowledge inſtantaneouſly. However, there are not wanting thoſe, who ſuppoſe all notions of Inſpiration, of ſupernatural knowledge and power communicated to Man, to be falſe and vain. Leaving therefore the fact above related to ſtand or fall with Inſpiration in general, the

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principal objections that have been lately urged againſt the truth and reality of this, ſhall in the ſequel of this diſcourſe be conſidered: And in order to remove thoſe objections I will endeavour firſt to evince that there are certain criteria, by which an inſpired perſon may himſelf know aſſuredly when he is inſpired; as alſo that there are certain means by which this knowledge may be communicated to others who are uninſpired: and will 2dly examine the inſpiration of the apoſtles of Chriſt according to the rules laid down.

It cannot be denied, that He, who eſtabliſhed the laws of nature, can, whenever He ſees fit, ſuperſede thoſe laws: and if we can aſſign a cauſe worthy of ſuch extraordinary interpoſition of the Deity, we muſt believe He will do it. If then the promulgation of certain divine truths, that concerned not the intereſts of this or that ſociety of men, but on which depended the good and happineſs

of the whole race of mankind, could not be rendered effectual, without ſome ſupernatural diſplay of divine power; we have a cauſe or motive demanding and worthy of the effect, whoſe reality it is here propoſed to eſtabliſh. And conſidered in this view, we may venture to pronounce the poſſibility of Inſpiration. True it is, that the vain illuſions of diſtempered zeal may impoſe upon a weak judgment and heated imagination; and miſrepreſent the wild flights of enthuſiaſm for holy raptures of Inſpiration. But ſtill though one perſon ſhould fancy himſelf to be inſpired, when he is not; this affects not the poſſibility of another perſon's feeling and knowing that he is inſpired, when he really is ſo. It has however been aſſerted, by the adverſaries of revelation, that no one can know aſſuredly that he is inſpired; or, granting that he was inſpired, yet it is utterly impracticable that he ſhould ever produce indubitable credentials of a divine commiſſion to others, who are uninſpired. Which leads

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me to conſider, as was propoſed in the firſt place, whether certain criteria might not be diſcovered; which would infallibly prove the reality of Inſpiration both to the inſpired perſon himſelf, and to others.

If we allow that God can in particular caſes, and for ſpecial reaſons, enlarge the powers of human agents, in an extraordinary manner; may we not alſo believe that he can communicate to the perſons thus inſpired ſuch inconteſtable evidence of their Inſpiration, as ſhall with regard to themſelves place the truth of the fact beyond all doubt? Whoever conſiders the vaſt power and influence which He who formed the ſoul muſt have upon it, muſt believe that he can afford ſuch clear and ſtrong conviction of any truths he ſhall be pleaſed extraordinarily to communicate, can give ſuch a vigorous perception, can accompany his own revelations with ſuch ſufficient proofs of the reality of them; that the perſons charged with

them, ſhall aſſuredly know whether they are from God.

Let us ſuppoſe a man of ordinary underſtanding; or, to place the matter in a ſtronger light, an ignorant illiterate perſon to feel his mind on a ſudden opened, his underſtanding illumined, and his ideas enlarged; muſt he not conclude ſuch an effect to be ſome way ſupernatural? If he perceives within himſelf a knowledge of certain facts, which perhaps till then he never thought on; or at moſt never thought on, but with perplexity and obſcurity: if without any nice diſquiſitions, any laborious reſearches he ſees, by a kind of intuitive knowledge, truths, which before he was not able to aſcertain by any deductions of reaſon; if it be further given him, to pierce into the dark womb of time, and there diſcover productions maturing into birth; muſt he not conclude this ſudden acquiſition of knowledge to be ſupernatural: that is, muſt he not conclude

conclude himſelf to be inſpired? To give objections their full claim; let it be granted that on weak and diſtempered minds fancy may operate thus ſtrongly, that all this may be effected by enthuſiaſm. Yet when this enlargement of the intellectual powers is likewiſe attended with the evidence of the ſenſes; when to this fancied knowledge is added a power of working miracles: when the man poſſeſt of wiſdom and diſcernment, which might ſeem too wonderful aad excellent for mere man to attain to, alſo performs things which are beyond the ordinary operations of nature: when he can converſe with people of all nations, in languages which before he never heard, and finds himſelf underſtood by them; when ſickneſs and diſeaſe fly at his touch; when he can ſay to the lame, walk, and he walketh, and to the blind, receive thy ſight, and he receiveth it: the perſon ſo inſpired may reſt well aſſured, that this is no vain illuſion, but a real Inſpiration; God himſelf as it were by

ſigns and miracles thus ſetting his ſeal to the truth and reality of it.

Theſe are the means, and ſufficient means they ſeem to be, whereby a perſon may judge whether he himſelf be inſpired, or not. And the laſt argument alledged for this purpoſe, viz. the power of working miracles, is no weak one towards the conviction of others. But as very uncommon things may have been effected by natural powers, as we cannot exactly determine upon the powers that ſuperior ſpirits may be permitted to exerciſe: before miracles can be abſolutely pronounced divine, they muſt have ſome good deſign to ſerve, ſome end worthy of the great cauſe to which they are aſcribed. And what cauſe upon earth ſo worthy of God's interpoſition, as that of virtue and religion? If then the miracles be wrought in confirmation of the pureſt and compleateſt ſyſtem of morality that can be conceived; we may judge of the divinity of the miracles from the end they

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are intended to ſerve: The authority of thoſe precepts may be eſtimated by the powers evinced in the promulgation of them; and, as our Lord Himſelf argues, the perſons thus charged may be believed for the work's ſake. To ſuppoſe a perſon himſelf inſpired, incapable of proving the divinity of his commiſſion to others who are uninſpired, is an hypotheſis almoſt too abſurd to need confutation.

Can we ſuppoſe that God would reveal to any one truths, the knowledge and belief of which are eſſential to the happineſs of mankind; without inveſting the perſon ſo charged with powers ſufficient to convince the reaſoning and unprejudiced part of the world of the divinity of his commiſſion? To grant the heaven-favoured propheteſs the gift of Inſpiration, but at the ſame time ſhut up the hearts of the perſons moſt concerned in thoſe prophecies againſt all confidence and belief in them; may form a pretty fable for Pagan theology

theology, but will never find a place in the creed of a rational Chriſtian. Such a notion degrades the Deity. *The manifeſtation of the ſpirit is given to every man to profit withal.* The extraordinary gifts of Inſpiration are conferred on no man for his own private advantage, honour, or ſatisfaction; but for the general good and benefit of others. But what general good or benefit could poſſibly accrue from any one's Inſpiration; if he could convince nobody of the divinity of his commiſſion, and in conſequence of it, of the excellence of thoſe doctrines which he was delegated to promulge, and of the degree of aſſent that was therefore due to them? Hence it appears, that the abſurdity of ſuch a ſuppoſition is itſelf a ſufficient confutation of it.

Another corroborative argument, for I mention it not as ſingly ſuch, whereby the reality of the Inſpiration may be made appear to others, is the ſucceſs this ſuppoſed ſyſtem

ſyſtem ſhall meet with. If it fall to the ground with the firſt preachers, no farther good being diſcerned to proceed from it; we may aſſure ourſelves of the falſity of it: for a religion divinely inſtituted, muſt neceſſarily be divinely ſupported. And if a religion be attended with a ſucceſs infinitely above the ſlender means that human aſſiſtance afforded; this is a corroborative argument of the truth of it: though an argument of little force taken ſingly. For a falſe religion God may permit to flouriſh; either to keep alive a zeal, in thoſe who are ſo happy as to be engaged in the profeſſion of the true one; or as a ſtumbling block for ſuch as ſtop their ears againſt the voice which whiſpers joy and comfort, which charmeth ever ſo wiſely; or for the puniſhment of thoſe, who if they hear with their ears, and underſtand with their heart, yet with ſo cold and languid wiſhes receive the word, that their thoughts and actions are at perpetual variance; or for ſome other wiſe and good purpoſe,

purpoſe, beſt and perhaps only known to God Himſelf.

In ſhort, as no one can limit the powers of Omnipotence, where no contradiction is implied; no one can with any pretence of reaſon deny the poſſibility of Inſpiration. And by thoſe general rules, above alledged, to evince the truth of the Inſpiration, both to the inſpired perſon himſelf, and to thoſe who are uninſpired, it ſeems not only poſſible but eaſy to diſtinguiſh real Inſpiration from enthuſiaſm or impoſture. According to theſe eſtabliſhed rules then we will, as was in the ſecond place propoſed, examine the Inſpiration of the Apoſtles of Chriſt.

And firſt, here are a ſet of ignorant illiterate men, taken from their manual occupations; who voluntarily renounce all wordly comforts, all eaſe, and ſatisfaction, and take upon them to reform the world: and to the confuſion of the wiſe men of the world publiſh

liſh doctrines of ſuch height and importance, as the greateſt reach of human philoſophy was never able to extend to; the reſurrection of the dead, the doctrines of a future ſtate, and the final retribution of rewards and puniſhments. Nor were theſe high important truths uſhered into the world with the weakneſs and inſufficiency, the madneſs and enthuſiaſm of field preachers; they were ſupported and enforced by miracles, by extraordinary ſigns, and many wonderful works. Theſe men like their great maſter, gave ſight to the blind, ſtrength to the lame, and healed all manner of diſeaſe among the people. The conſciouſneſs of having their minds illumined with ſuch knowledge as this, attended with the inconteſtible evidence of the ſenſes, muſt to the perſons themſelves be a full and ſufficient aſſurance of the real divinity of their commiſſion: and by theſe marks the apoſtles of Chriſt were ſo thoroughly convinced of their own Inſpiration, that they laid down their lives in confirmation

firmation of it. Which circumſtance affords another, and that no inconſiderable argument for the conviction of others.

To this end however, agreeably to the rules before laid down, beſides the power of working miracles, it is neceſſary that the drift and deſign of thoſe miracles be good; that is, that the doctrines, in ſupport and confirmation of which they are wrought, be of ſo pure a nature, as may challenge the divine interpoſition, and not be imputable to the agency of daemons or evil ſpirits. Accordingly the utmoſt efforts of human reaſon, aſſiſted with all the advantages of learning and experience were never able to frame a ſyſtem of morality, ſo aptly calculated for univerſal practice, ſo well adapted to every capacity, ſo pure, ſo perfect, as the religion of Jeſus Chriſt. Indeed the perfect purity that Chriſtianity requires of its profeſſors has been the greateſt, if not only ſource of thoſe cavils which men of libertine principles have laboured

laboured to raiſe againſt it. The laſt concurrent circumſtance mentioned as neceſſary to evince the divinity of any religion, is the ſucceſs of it. And truly the apoſtles wrought no greater miracle, than the amazing progreſs of Chriſtianity affords us. It was promulgated by a ſet of indigent, deſtitute, ignorant, illiterate men. It comprized a ſyſtem of morality, utterly deſtructive of vice and vanity, directly oppoſite to men's luſts and paſſions, to the folly and pleaſurable purſuits of this world: and conſequently moſt obnoxious to thoſe who moſt enjoyed ſuch gratifications; which were in general thoſe who had it moſt in their power to enjoy them. It was therefore not only unſupported by the countenance of power and authority, but moſt violently oppoſed by thoſe whoſe exalted ſtations gave them opportunity of doing the greateſt harm to it. No ſword was drawn in its ſupport, nor had it the rudeneſs of Arabs to practiſe upon. No darling pleaſure, no choice ſenſuality was reſerved

ſerved to comfort its profeſſors for the loſs of the reſt. The ſtrenuous aſſertors of Chriſtianity had no temporal rewards to look for; no recompence to ſpirit them up under all the various difficulties they had to encounter, but what was from above: they were not made captains of hundreds, and captains of thouſands. The more bold, the more indefatigable they were in propagating the doctrines they were charged with; the more cruelly they were perſecuted. They were ſpoken againſt every where, they met with nothing but contempt, calumny, impriſonment, and death in all its moſt formidable ſhapes. *Yet in ſpite of all theſe* difficulties, in ſpite of all oppoſition, ſo amazingly did this religion flouriſh and prevail; that in a ſhort time princes became its patrons and protectors, and queens its nurſing mothers. And at this day the moſt poliſhed parts of the globe, however looſe particulars may be in practice, profeſs Chriſtianity.

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From this repreſentation nude and impartial, I think it evidently appears, that there are certain criteria by which a real Inſpiration may be diſtinguiſhed from all falſe pretenſions to it; and that the Inſpiration of the apoſtles of Chriſt doth in every circumſtance exactly coincide with the rules for this purpoſe eſtabliſhed. If from hence we turn our eyes to the impoſtures of an eminent pretender to divine Inſpiration; we ſhall find, that a general defectiveneſs in every rule above laid down abundantly proclaims the falſity of ſuch his pretenſions. Conſider the cunning inſinuating Mahomet, making his religion ſubſerve the moſt ambitious views; engaging in his projects men of equal art and ſubtlety with himſelf, and rewarding their faithful ſervices with temporal honours and wealth: conſider his ridiculous pretences to miracles unatteſted, and his final appeal to the ſword for conviction; and laſtly conſider the nature of his doctrines, which not only permitted, but even enjoined the the moſt inordinate

ſenſualities: and from hence may be collected the very great diſtinction that lies between real Inſpiration and all falſe pretenſions to it.

Repreſent to yourſelves on the other hand, the religion of nature, the darling idol of the Deiſt; ſee him proſtrating himſelf to the ſtump of a tree, and ſaying to a carved ſtone, Thou art my God: attend her votaries to their religious ceremonies, and you will find acted there the groſſeſt obſcenities; approach their altars, and you will find them ſtained with human ſacrifices; you will find throughout the vrieſt works of hell done under a blind pretence of pleaſing heaven: and from hence may be learned the very great neceſſity there was for a revelation. Let the man of reaſon think highly as he will of this principle; yet theſe were the wretched effects of unaſſiſted reaſon. And if modern Freethinkers have ſeen more deeply into, and argued more conſiſtently upon

upon religious matters than the antient heathens did; they can juſtly aſcribe this to nothing, but the ſtrong lights which Chriſtianity hath reflected on the ſubject.

To conclude therefore with a practical reflection, ſince God hath graciouſly condeſcended to afford us ſuch a light, how can we pay too great attention to it! With what profound reverence ought we to regard the precepts and doctrines, that Chriſt hath committed to us, the lively oracles of God! Blinded by ignorance, or prejudiced by our luſts, we may cavil at the doctrines, and refuſe to obey thoſe precepts; but it is impoſſible that we ſhould either amend the one, or better ourſelves by refuſing obedience to the other. We may torture and wreſt them; but we are forewarned, it will be to our own deſtruction. Let us rather with open hearts receive the religion of Chriſt; not barely as it is a national religion, though with honeſt men that would be a motive for

acquieſcence in it; but as a religion moſt unembarraſſed with difficulties, moſt pure, moſt perfect: a revelation moſt ſtrongly confirmed by unbiaſſed reaſon, moſt pregnant of bleſſings here, and exhibiting to us the nobleſt proſpect of eternal happineſs hereafter.

CONCIO

DE
STATU PARADISIACO.
CONCIO
In Eccleſia BEATÆ MARIÆ
Apud OXONIENSES
HABITA.

De STATU PARADISIACO.

CONCIO III.

ECCLUS. VII. 30.

Hoc tantum inveni; quod Deus homines perfectos creavit, ipſi autem ratiocinia plurima invenerunt.

TERRARUM hic noſter orbis, & quicquid in orbe virét, quicquid ultra hujuſce mundi fines aut oculus aſſequi, aut mens deprehendere poſſit, Deum optimum maximum arguit: tanta ſapientia, tanta ubique patet Potentia. O orbem fœli-

cem, ſummi artificis, omnibus abſolutum numeris, opus; cui herba quæque leviſſima, cui quicquid avium pecudumque uſquam invenitur, aut pulchritudinem aut uſum ſuppetit! O hominum fœliciſſimum genus; cui tot utilia, tot perpulchra ſerviunt! At longe aliter ſe res habet: tot tamque præclara et benevolentiæ et ſapientiæ Dei argumenta malum multiforme inquinat. Morborum numeroſa cohors, nec arte nec medicinâ depellenda, humana corpora obſidunt; animos pravi affectus deturpant: durâ adeo lege, vivitur, ut *fœliciſſimus ille, qui minus miſer.*

Quo fonte derivata mala hæc, ut dicuntur, tam naturalia, quam moralia, vitam humanam miſeriis ærumniſque obruerunt: quo pacto homines fœlicitate excíderunt, quos fœlicitati percipiendæ in lucem evocavit Deus; et olim et nunc temporis varié contenditur: nodus hercle Deo vindice dignus. Hinc alii, quales ſunt Manichæi, omnipotentiâ Dei denegatâ, dæmonem alterum, potentem

tentem quidem ſed maleſuadum et maleficum fingunt: cui ordinis perturbatio cordi eſt. Quodcunque boni aut excogitavit, aut effecit Deus; ut hoc inquinet, illud ut miſſum faciat, hic malorum opifex pro viribus uſque laborat: et, artis chymicæ ratione quaſi inversâ, ut ex optimo quoque malum eruat, huic labor atque opus eſt. Alii potentiam Dei ſummam eſſe agnoſcunt, providentiam ejus omnino tollunt: Deum talem deſignant, cujus majeſtati rerum humanarum moderamen ne minime conveniret; cujus fœlicitas ne perfecta et continuata fieret, hujusmodi curæ quam maxime obſtarent. "Eſt natura Dei," uti ab iis fictam, uti a Lucretio depictam accepimus,

"Semota ab noſtris rebus, ſejunctaque longe,
"Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangi-
"tur ira."

Ipsâ Dei exiſtentiâ ſublatâ, nodum alii audacite

daciter resolverunt. Si Deus sit, sicut hi ratiocinantur, ab operibus suis cur malum haud procul amovit? aut nequivit sane, aut noluit. Vel potestas ejus, vel benevolentia est finita: Ens vero, quoquo modo finitum, nequit esse vere et absolute Deus. Ratiocinio igitur si huic assentiamur, rerum lucidus ordo nullo moderamine certo geritur; sed sors omnia versat. Hisce variis de mali origine hypothesibus accedit altera; quæ naturam humanam ita esse comparatam affirmat, ut a malo separari et sejungi humanitatis sors omnino nequeat. Veri specie adeo inani delinitis malum quasi de essentiâ hominis esse videtur; et crimina quæque misericordiâ potius, quam pœnâ digna putantur. Hinc, non me malum! sed me miserum! clamare quisque in promptu habet: hinc neminem confitentem habemus reum; dum peccata quisque non sua deflet, sed quæ humana parum cavit natura. Hominum vero crimina in naturam humanam dum temere transferant; ne in autho-

rem

rem naturæ culpa ad extremum recidat, iſti parum cavent philoſophi.

Opinionem, quas ſupra memoravimus, prioribus tribus jam prætermiſſis, ad refellendam hanc poſteriorem, quippe quæ neotericis quibuſdam præcipue arridet, ſententiam potius accingor.

Hominum genus e creatoris ſummi manibus, adeo appetens mali, adeo impotens bene beateque vivendi, adeo imperfectum evaſiſſe fingunt hujuſce ſententiæ propugnatores; ut innocentiæ perfectæ et fœlicitatis ſtatus nec fuerit unquam, nec fore poterit. Si vero Moſeos de Statu Paradiſiaco, atque autorum ethnicorum de ætate aureâ, ſcriptis quid veri inſit; philoſophorum iſtorum hypotheſis reipsâ refellitur: et, ratiocinii ſui fundamine ſublato, quodcunque ſuper extruitur caſſum ruit. Statum igitur naturæ innocentiæ et fœlicitatis eſſe ſtatum, ac forte tali beatum hominum genus olim floruiſſe,

iſſe, hâc in concione contenditur: cujus tripliciter diviſæ hæc norma ſervabitur.

Quid de hominum conditione primâ, mundi ætate, in ſacris ſcripturis traditum accepimus, primò exponendum eſt.

Auctores profanos, tum poetas, tum philoſophos, eadem ſuffragantes deinde proferam.

Hæc tandem dogmata de Statu Paradiſiaco, ab antiquiſſimis ſcriptoribus tradita, rationi eſſe conſentanea tertiò comprobabitur.

Sermonis itaque hujuſce prædictam mihi ſervanti normam, quid de hominum conditione, mundi ætate primâ, ſcriptura ſacra tradit, primò inveſtigandum eſt. Fabricationem ἐξαμέρωνν depingens Moſes *, hæc re-

* In iſtâ narratione quædam eſſe parabolica, nonnulli exiſtimant: alii etiam ſermonem totum exemplar artificioſum eſſe volunt ad res veras explicandas; nempe naturæ primæ ſtatum Paradiſiacum, & ejuſdem degenerationem, necnon humani generis novitatem. Alii quaſi

fert; "Deus omnia, quæcunque fabricaverat, aſpexit; et ecce omnia bona:" omnia nempe ad aſſequendum finem, cujus gratiâ creabantur, in ſe fat poteſtatis habuerunt. Innocentiam primævam, et mali originem hiſtoricus idem divinus planè et enucleatè exponit. Porro ratio vitæ, quam parentes primi agebant, morum ſimplicitatem et ſecuritatem ab innocentiâ omnino ortam, hiſce verbis tradita, luculenter deſignat. "Ambo erant nudi Adam et uxor ipſius, neque illos pudebat." * Naturam nempe ducem et magiſtram ſecuti, nec labis ullius conſcii, nulla veſtium involucra quærebant; neque iis vitio fuit nuditas, dum imago iſta

quaſi hiſtoriam ſummâ fide dignam, narrationem totam ſenſu omnino ad literam expreſſo complectuntur. Explicatio quænam ſit veriſſima, hic loci non inveſtigandum duco: talem, qualis contenditur, extitiſſe ſtatum, degenerationem poſtea contigiſſe, ſententiæ utriuſque propugnatores pariter agnoſcunt.

* Hiſtorici ſacri ſententiæ iſti hæc Platonis conferatur. Γυμνοι δε και αϊστχυντοι θυραυλουντες τα πολλα ενεμοντο, το γαρ των ωρων αυτοις αλυπον ειχετο.

Dei

Dei, formâ humanâ eluceſſens, peccato intaminata ſtetit. Neque his ſolis clauſulis Statûs Paradiſiaci dogma innititur: ſcripturis ſacris excerptæ, ſententiæ aliæ proferri poſſent, quæ creationis mundi hiſtoriam, ſicut a Moſe traditam accepimus, non ſolum innuere, ſed plane affirmare naturæ humanæ perfectionem, ſatis arguunt. Innocentiæ et fœlicitatis primorum parentum fidem apud Judæos ſummam valuiſſe hinc præcipue liquet; quod Apoſtoli de ſorte iſtâ beatâ, traditionibus acceptâ, Moſe luculenter expoſitâ, prophetarum monitis munitâ, non obſcurè, dubitanter, et quaſi ambagibus, ſummâ vero cum fiduciâ loquuntur: quippe quod pro certo uſque habebatur. Sententias huc ſpectantes, in novo fœdere paſſim diſperſas, ut plurimas omittam; hæc Pauli verba exemplum ampliſſimum præbent. "Sicut uno homine peccatum in mundum introivit, mors quoque peccati causâ, &c." ac in eodem capite paulum infra, "ſicut hominis unius inobedientiâ plurimi fiebant peccatores, &c."

Quibus

Quibus ex clauſulis Apoſtolum, ut ſatisfactionem Chriſti omnes complecti omnis ætatis homines probaret, felicitatis primæ jacturam non modo nudò et ſimplicitèr affirmare conſtat; hoc vero ex dogmate, quaſi re cognitâ et univerſum conceſsâ poſito, ad alias probationes progreditur. Sed in re apertiſſimâ diutius cur immorandum? Tum felicitatem primævam, tum felicitatis iſtius jacturam, ſcriptura ſacra ſi alibi uſque taceret; ad utramque probandam prædictæ ſolæ clauſulæ abunde ſufficiunt, et quaſi vim habent demonſtrationis. Sententias ergo ſupra memoratas hæc, de quâ jam concionamur, claudat. " Hoc tantum inveni, quod homines perfectos effinxit Deus; ipſi autem ratiocinia plurima invenerunt."

Clauſulis iſtis cæteriſque plurimis, quæ, idem ſpectantes, in ſcripturis ſacris inveniuntur, ſibi invicem collatis; hæc dogmata ſummatim exinde ſequi habentur. Mundi origine primâ homines, uti alia ſingula ſapientiſſimi

entiſſimi et omnipotentis auctoris opera, perfecti creabantur. Appetitus ſingulos, ad fœlicitatem aſſequendam, ad promovendam virtutem unice ſpectantes, et mutùo et amicè conſpirantes, ratio gubernatrix adminiſtravit. Satis et ad fœlicitatem et ad virtutem valebant: dum hanc excolant, illa fruuntur; hâc læsâ, illa amittitur. Libera benè beatèque vivendi datur poteſtas; nulla imponitur neceſſitas: cuique incoacta ſua ſtetit voluntas. Minus morigeros denique ſe præbuerunt, imperium Dei repugnarunt, juſſaque detrectarunt: Inobedientiæ ſuæ pœnas luebant. Hinc malum oritur; et vires acquirens eundo, longè latèque ingruit. Hoc fonte derivata, clades omnigena ubique diffunditur; hinc, quicquid vitam humanam miſeram aut inſuavem reddit, quale quale inſit amari, id totum accipit; ſeroſque in nepotes defluens, contagii inſtar, naturam humanam commutaſſe videtur; immo, ſi fas ſit vera loquî, commutavit.

Senſu

Senſu ſcripturæ ſacræ de primâ hominum conditione ita breviter expoſito; quid de eâdem autores profani conſcripſerunt, ſervato propoſito, proximè inveſtigandum eſt: rerum enim antiquiſſimarum, quæ in literis ſacris continentur, hiſtoriam, quamvis pleſumque obſcuram, apud omnes gentes remanſiſſe conſtat. Cumque concionis noſtræ norma clauſulas ex ſcriptoribus ethnicis pluſes, quàm in hujuſce generis ſcriptis commendat uſus, proferri poſtulet; apud hunc confeſſum me excuſatum iri ſpero. A philoſophis igitur ac hiſtoricis, quippe queis major quam poetis fides habetur, initium ſumendum duco. Quos inter præcipuus Plutarchus, philoſophus idem et hiſtoricus, regionis cujuſdam, notis Paradiſi diſtinctæ, nomine inſularum beatarum deſignatæ, deſcriptionem exhibet; cui orbis terrarum portiuncula omnino nulla nunc temporis convenit *. " Imbres, *inquit ille*, rari et amæni

* Ὀμβροις δὲ χρωμεναι μετριοις ςπανιως, τα δὲ πλειστα πνευμασι μαλακοις και δροσωδεσι, σν μονον αρουν και φυτειαν παρεχουσιν αγαθην και πιονα χωραν, αλλα και καρ-

hic loci decidunt; dum venti molliter ſpirantes, et rore quaſi alati, inſulam pervagentur: quibus efficitur, ut ſtudio et labore nullo eliciti, omnigenæ herbæ fructuſque jucundiſſimi ſuapte naſcantur." Deſcriptioni huic ſententiam proxime ſequentem hiſtoricus inſuper addit. " * Adeo ut fides uſque ad barbaros perlata firma eſt, illic campos eſſe Elyſios, et beatorum ſedes quas Homerus decantavit." Hinc de Paradiſo, ſive beatorum ſede quid ſenſit Plutarchus, quid etiam barbari ſenſere, liquet.

Eadem fere, quæ de inſulis fortunatis Plutarchus, de inſulâ Toprobanâ aſſerit Diodorus Siculus: *hoc inſuper addito*, nempe quod hujuſce regionis incolæ expertem mor-

που αυτοφυη φερουσιν, αποχρωντα πληθει και γλυκυτητι βοσκειν ανευ πονων και πραγματειας σχολαζοντα δημον.
PLUT. in Vit. Sert.

* *Ωστε μεχρι των βαρβαρων διηχθαι πιστιν ισχυραν, αυτοθι το ηλυσιον πεδιον, και την των ευδαιμονων οικησιν, ην Ομηρος υμνησεν.* Ibid.

borum

borum vitam agebant. Nec prætermittendum duco, quod de morte Tobrobanitarum hiſtoricus idem tradit; utpote ſententiam haud omnino iſti diſſimilem, quam ſcriptores quidam Chriſtiani de morte, vel potius e vitâ exceſſu, in ſtatu paradiſiaco ſi homines uſque permanſiſſent, ſtatuere.* "Duplex apud eos naſcitur herba; cui ſi quis indormiat, cruciatûs omnis [et doloris expertem mors grata ſuaviſque ſupervenit." Sententia iſta Diodori Moſaicæ *arboris vitæ* explicationem fortaſſe veriſſimam præbet; quippe qua ab origine narratio illa primitus derivatur. Mors, ſi hiſtorico ſacro fidem habeamus, non humanitatis conditio, ſed peccati pœna, plane conſtituta fuit. Arbori vitæ igitur talem, quid vetat ineſſe vim, qualis fructum ejus guſtanti tranſitum facilem atque ſuavem ad immortalitatem conciliaret.

* Φυεσθαι γαρ αυτοις διφυη βοτανην, ᾡ ης οταν τις κοιμηθη, λεληθοτως και απονως προς υπνον καταενεχθεις αποθνησκει. Diod. Sic. lib. 2.

Paradiſum quendam in Africâ ſitum Procopius fingit; fontibus amœnis irrigatum, ſylvis ornatum, viridantibus uſque, quæque uſque dulce redolebant: dum aerem tepentem frigiduli venti continuò mulcerent. Talem deniqe ſtatum, qualis hac in concione contenditur, olim revera extitiſſe, non ſolos inter Hebræos, aut Ægyptos, aut Græcos fides valuit; in idem conſentientes Indos quoque habemus: quos apud Calanus Alexandrum magnum ita alloquens a Strabone inducitur.* "Tritici hordeique olim erant, ſicut nunc pulveris, omnia plena; fontes quoque, alii aquâ, lacte alii, alii melle, alii vino, nonnulli oleo fluebant: donec ob ſatietatem luxuriamque homines in contumeliam ſeſe tradiderunt. Statum igitur præſentem

* Το παλαιον παντ' ην αλφιτων και αλευρων πληρη, καθαπερ και νυν κοπεως· και κρηναι δ' ερρεον, αι μεν υδατος, γαλακτος δ' αλλαι, και ομοιως αι μεν μελιτος, αι δ' οινου, τινες δ' ελαιου· υπο πλησμονης δ' οι ανθρωποι και τρυφης εις υβριν εξεπιπτον. Ζευς δε, μισησας την καταστασιν, ηφανισε παντα, και δια πονου τον βιον απεδειξε. Strab. lib. 15.

Jupiter

Jupiter exoſus, omnia abolevit; * *vitamque labore degendam inſtituit.*" Nemo, ut opinor, hæc legens, quo ex fonte manarint, diu dubitabit.

Scriptoribus iſtis, regionem naturâ plane eandem, ſitu loci utcunque diverſam, deſignantibus, philoſophum gravem et inſtar omnium Platonem jam tandem ſubjiciam. In dialogo iſto, cui titulus Πολιτικος adſcribitur, quippe qui, procœmium veluti, libris ſequentibus Πολιτειας και νομων præponitur, de origine politiæ philoſophus fuſè diſſerit. Et, re altè repetitâ, hominem a deo creatum conditione primum beatiſſimâ et verè aureâ potitum eſſe docet. Ætatis aureæ et fælicis decriptionem μυθον appellat; traditionem aliunde deſumptam iſto nomine deſignans: ne quis forſan pro figmento et ſomniis quaſi φιλοσοφητος narrationem habeat. Fidem ac authoritatem quam huic μυθω conciliatam vellet, hæc ſua teſtantur

* Vid. Geneſ. Cap. 2 Com. 19.

verba.* Iſta nobis tradiderunt primi illi majorum noſtrorum, qui primam mundi revolutionem proxime contingebant. Horum ſermonum teſtes præconeſque illi extiterunt." Platonicæ iſti primævæ fœlicitatis tabellæ, coloribus adeo vividis depictæ, haud abs re erit paulo diutius immorari: in qua ſi veritatem ipſam non deprehendamus, veritatis ſaltem veſtigia nemo fere non agnoſcet.† "Ætate iſtâ, nihil erat ferum; neque aliæ alias animantes vorabant: aberat bellum penitus atque ſeditio.——Deus homines paſcebat; ipſe erat et paſtor eorum et cuſtos: ipſoque eos regente, civitatum con-

* Απεμνημονευετο δ' υπο των ημετερων προγονων των πρωτων, οι πελευτωσι μεν τη πρωτερα περιφορα τον εξης χρονον εγειτονουν, της δε κατ' αρχας εφυοντο. τουτων γαρ ουτοι κηρυκες εγενοθ' ημιν των λογων. Plato Πολιτ:

† Τοτε ουκ αγριον ουδεν, ουτε αλληλων εδωδαι, πολεμος ουκ ην, ουδε ςασις τοιαραπαν. — Θεος ενεμεν αυτους, αυτος επιςατων.—Νεμοντος δε εκεινου, πολιτειαι ουκ ησαν.—Καρπους δε αφθονους ειχον απο τε δενδρων και πολλης υλης αλλης, ουκ απο γεωργιας φυομενους, αλλ' αυτοματης ανιδιδουσης της γης. Plat. Politic. tom. 2. pag. 271. edit. Steph.

civitatum

ſtitutiones nullæ erarent.——Fructus illis, et poma et fruges, arbores et fertile ſolum ſponte ſuâ ſubminiſtrabant." De Saturni regno alia plurima philoſophus idem ſcribit; quæ ſtatum paradiſiacum quam veriſſime deſignant. Alia, ut ipſe teſtatur, innumera, et illis longe mirabiliora, ab ejuſdem rei quaſi fonte permanant: longinquitate vero temporis, partim ſunt exoleta, partim diſperſa atque diſſipata perturbate dicuntur. Deſcriptioni illi uberrimæ ſi quid amplius deerit, quo Platonis ſententia de hac re plenius eniteſceret; Τιμαιυ, ſive περι φυσεως dialogi, pars iſta, in quâ de hominum creatione agitur, argumenta huc ſpectantia ampliſſima præbet; ubi de mali cauſâ et origine argutè diſſeritur. Ex involucris tandem, quibus veritas fere obruitur, hoc veri erui poteſt: homines benè, juſtè, et honeſtè vixiſſe contenditur, dum in ſemet impreſſam dei ſimilitudinem puram atque intaminatam conſervarent; malè vero, poſtquam cupiditatibus craſſis et corporeis ſemet ipſos involviſſent.

Ab hiſtoricis et philoſophis ad poetas deſcendere, ac Homerum Elyſios campos depingentem in primis audire, erit operæ pretium.

* Vitæ hic humanæ ratio jucunda paratur;
Nec fera tempeſtas, nec nigri nubila cæli
Inficiunt æthram, tranquillâ luce ſerenam:
Suaviter aſt Zephyri ſpirantes arva ſalutant,
Et leviter ſtringunt recreata ſilentia ponti.

Quid de hortis Alcinoi dicam? nonne hi quoque ab eodem fonte derivantur? Terræ Phæaciæ deſcriptiones iſtæ conveniunt? Varia omnino fictaque ceciniſſe poetam grex totus criticorum negat. Quo vero pictura illa amœni, immo amœnitatis, horti referenda eſt? Non, ut iidem fingunt, ad inſulas Atlanticas; neque uſquam regionum præter

* Τῃ τερ ῥηϊστη βιοτη πελει ανθρωποισι,
Ου νιφετοι, ουτ' αρ' χειμων πολυς, ουτε ποτ' ομβρος.
Αλλ' αιει ζεφυροιο λιγυπνειοντας απτας
Ωκεανος ανιησιν αναψυχειν ανθρωπους.

eam,

eam, ab hominibus primis enarratam, a primis ſcriptoribus depictam, præter Paradiſum. Genus hominum primigenorum decantans, locum Homero proximum Heſiodus ſibi vendicat; ejuſdem, ut aliqui volunt, ut alii, ætatis prioris ſcriptor.

* Tunc homines divûm vivebant more; neque illos
Anxia curarum moles, operumque labores
Laſſabant: aberat morbus, triſtiſque Senectus.
Igneus aſt ollis vigor; et dum corpore vires
Regnabant ſolido, convivia læta placebant.
Mors ſimilis ſomno fuit, atque uberrima tellus
Omnia liberius nullo cogente ferebat
In commune bonum, nec quiſquam invidit habenti.

Nemo, ut opinor, ſcriptorum Chriſtianorum ſtatum Paradiſiacum plenius et melius,

* Ωστε θεοι δ' εζων, ακηδεα θυμον εχοντες
Νοσφιν ατερτε πονων και οϊζυος· ουδε τι δειλον
Γηρας επην· αιει δε ποδας και χειρας ομοιοι
Τερποντ' εν θαλιησι, κακων εκτοσθεν απαντων.
Θνησκον δ' ως υπνω δεδμημενοι· εσθλα δε παντα
Τοισιν· αυταρ καρπον εφερε ζειδωρος αρουρα
Αυτοματη, πολλοντε, και αφθονον, &c.

depinixit,

depinxit, quám in iſtis verſibus Heſiodus. Ætatem auream ab Ovidio in libro primo metamorphoſium expreſſam, utpote omnibus notam, prætermitto. Neque de regno Saturnio tacet Virgilius.

Ante jovem nulli ſubigebant arva coloni:
Nec ſignare quidem, aut partiri limite campum
Fas erat; in medium quærebant: ipſaque tellus
Omnia liberius, nullo poſcente, ferebat.

Ad calcem libri proxime ſequentis, ſcilicet 2di Georgicorum, hi verſus idem quoque ſpectant.

Ante etiam ſceptrum Dictæi regis, et ante
Impia quàm cæſis gens eſt epulata iuvencis;
Aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.

En manifeſtam ſtatûs Paradiſiaci notam! quum homines nondum animalium carne, ſed ſolis terræ fructibus veſcerentur. Sententiæ iſtæ variæ, ex ſcriptoribus antiquis excerptæ, ſuaviloquis hiſce verbis Lucretianis jam tandem claudentur.

Iamque

Iamque adeo affecta eſt ætas, affœtaque tellus,
Vix animalia parva creat, quæ cuncta creavit
Sæcla, deditque ferarum ingentia corpora partu.

Præterea nitidas fruges, vinetaque læta
Sponte ſuâ primum mortalibus ipſa creavit.
Ipſa dedit dulces fœtus, et pabula læta:
Quæ nunc vix noſtro grandeſcunt aucta labore.

Statum hominum primigenium eo, quo nunc degitur, perfectiorem ipſe Epicuri diſcipulus planè agnoſcit. Neque ſtatum naturæ talem poeta iſte agnoviſſet, niſi ut rem fide digniſſimam: rem univerſâ traditione acceptam, graviſſimorum hominum auctoritate ſancitam. Narrationes igitur iſtas, quibus ipſe Lucretius ſuffragatur, pro anili fabellâ ecquis ducet? Scriptorem illum, qui animum fabulis vanis arctiſque religionis compagibus occupatum exſolvere pro viribus contendit, illum inquam credulitatis arguere, ecquis in animum inducat? De ſtatu Paradiſiaco quæ tot tantique ſcriptores protulerunt, alii pænè innumeri, ſi res poſtularet, et locus ferret,

eadem

eadem ſuffragantes allegari poſſent. Quid, iſta omnia de conditione hominum primigeniâ pro figmentis poeticis habenda putabimus? Nonne philoſophos, nonne hiſtoricos, viros eruditos graviſſimoſque in eadem conſentientes habemus? Singulos, ſi non vera, certe veriſimilia proferentes? Singulas enim iſtas de regno ſaturni, ætate aureâ, et ſimilibus deſcriptiones, obumbratas quidem et variis erroribus implicitas, hiſtoriæ Moſaicæ veſtigiis inſiſtere atque inſequi nullus dubito. Ab extremo fonte, nempe a primævis hominibus derivatas, veriſſimas ætatis primæ narrationes accepit Noa: eaſdemque, a Noæ filiis traditas, poſteros accepiſſe, haud minus conſtat.*

Tertiò probandum reſtat, ut hiſtoriæ iſtæ de Statu Paradiſiaco, a primis hominibus accep-

* Primam hominis vitam cum ſimplicitate fuiſſe, et nudo corpore, docebant et Ægyptii; unde aurea poetarum ætas, etiam Indis celebrata, ut apud Strabonem eſt. Grotius de ver Rel. Chr. lib. 1. Sect. 16.

tæ,

tæ, ſcriptoribus tum ſacris tum profanis confirmatæ, minimè futiles eſſe et ineptæ demonſtrentur: immo e contra, rationi conſentanea, naturâ humanâ digna, Deo optimo maximo digniſſima eſſe hypotheſis iſta contenditur. Omne ens, ut loquuntur ſcholaſtici, eſt perfectum: quo dogmate perfectio relativa, non abſoluta, ſignificatur. Quodcunque a ſapientiſſimo Deo creatum eſt, id omnibus numeris abſolutum creari neceſſe eſt. Dum ſingulæ cujuſque facultates atque organa inopiis ſuis ſubveniendis, ſuis optatis potiundis apta et idonea, fœlicitati propriæ inſerviant, ad fœlicitatem propriam aſſequendam omnino ſufficiant. Hoc experientia docet omnium, qui in ſtudiis hiſtoriæ phyſicæ verſantur: hoc, quaquaverſum lumina circumferamus, adeo conſtat; ut ſi Davidi liceat jure exclamare, ‘ *O Domine, in ſapientiâ omnia feciſti:* ’ haud injuriâ exclamationem alteram ſubjecit, *terra, O Domine, plena eſt benevolentiâ tuâ.* O infœlicem humanæ naturæ ſortem, O homines infortunatos! qui,

qui, hujuſce orbis dominatores conſtituti, in hoc orbe miſeri ſoli deprehenduntur: qui tot animalium principes, uniuſcujuſque ſua quatenus poſtulat natura perfecti, imperfecti ſoli effinguntur. Cuinam enim bono dux iſta et jucundiſſima comes vitæ, ut vanè garriunt philoſophi, ratio inſervit: quapropter divina iſta auræ particula nobis conceſſa eſt? Anne, ut perfectionis iſtius, iſtius virtutis apicem hominibus oſtendat, quem natura humana nequit attingere; anne ob ea ut excruciet homines, quæ hominum natura effugere nequit, commiſſa; anne ut miſeros homines reddat? *Talia, O Domine, procul tibi abſint conſilia!* actionum ergo humanarum moderatrix iſta conceditur, ut actiones morales dirigat, ut appetitus cohibeat, ut vitam ſuavem atque jucundam reddat. Ei itaque aſſequendo fini aut ſufficit ratio, aut non. Si non, impar eſt fini inſtituto; ac homines, quibus hujuſce finis gratiâ ratio conceditur, eatenus ſunt imperfecti: Omne vero ens e manibus creatoris perfectum evaſit. Fini igitur propoſito

poſito ſufficit ratio: nunc autem temporis rationem in finem iſtam haud quaquam ſufficere experientia quotidiana teſtatur; ergo olim ſe rem ita habuiſſe neceſſe eſt. Atque ex his ratiociniis ſequitur, talem fuiſſe primævum naturæ humanæ ſtatum, qualem a primis ſcriptoribus expreſſum accepimus.

Quantum miſeriarum vitam hominum obſidet, neminem latet; ac prævidentia ipſa miſeriarum quæ eludi nequeunt, quas neque prudentia effugere, neque ipſa virtus repellere valet, miſerias graviores reddit. Ferarum vita in malis verſatur; illas vero nec præteriti recordatio, neque timor futuri excruciatas tenet; natura illis largita eſt jucunda oblivia vitæ. Aſt morbi, dolores, mors, et pallida malorum cohors, non modo hominum veſtigia comites certiſſimi inſequuntur, oculis autem continuo obverſantur, et mentibus quaſi inhærent. Et ſi partem alteram vitæ humanæ contempleris, certa homines ne minima quidem voluptas manet.

Hoccine

Hoccine vero creatoris benevolentis, hoccine eſt Dei optimi maximi; ut animantes crearet, quas magna et plurima neceſſario premunt mala; quarum vitas voluptates parvulæ tantùm, breves, et fortuitæ mulcent?

Quid, nonne hominis vita, affectibus cum ratione bellum civile gerentibus, certamine perpetuo verſatur? Meliora laudare atque probare, deteriora ſequi, humanum eſt. Spes, Timor, Ira, Grex totus affectuum ἀπειθείαν ciens, viciſſim dominatur; dum ratio, gubernatrix veluti timida et puſilla, ſervis iſtis rebellibus politiam hominis internam adminiſtrandam tradit. Facultatum illam humanarum dominam et reginam, quid verum eſt atque decens, monentem homines male adverſantur: iis, prava jubentibus, aures faciles præbent; quodcunque mali conſulunt, obtemperare heu nimis parati! Hebeſcente denique et quaſi defatigato appetitu, torva aſpici redit ratio; delictique eos tunc ſerò pudet, piget, pœnitetque. Quid multis? peccare

Peccare, et pœnitere, atque iterum peccare, vitam humanam miſerâ viciſſitudine diſtinguit. Picturæ vero humani generis iſti imaginem alteram et longè diverſam conferre liceat: hominis imaginem, innocentiæ et fœlicitatis compotem. Corporis atque animi vires puta aptè amiceque conſpirantes: mentem ſcientiâ omnigenâ inſtructam; arbitrium voluntati Dei inſerviens; appetitus congrua et conſentanea quærentes, affectus denique ſummiſſos et rationi obtemperantes: facultatibus humanis ita ordinatis (et facultates rectè ordinari quid vetat?) Harmonia Platonica inde ſequitur, hinc Moſeos Status Paradiſiacus: hinc ætas aurea poetarum.

Perfectionis iſtius apicem, in qua homines primitus creari demonſtrat râtio, ipſorumque conditionem, quam experientia hodierna probat, qui perpenderunt philoſophi, tantæ metamorphoſeos cauſas hinc et inde quæſiverunt. Mutationem ipſam nemo fere dubitavit, cauſa uſque latebat. Nodum iſtum reſolvere

ſolvere, nodum herclè Deo vindice dignum, veritatis fons et principium Deus ipſe dignatus eſt: *Nubeſque inter et tenebras, quæ obvolvunt eum, æquitatem et juſtitiam ſolo ejus inſidere, demonſtravit.* Et ecquis adeo iniquus eſt rerum æſtimator, qui œconomiæ divinæ explicationem talem nullius ponderis aut uſus leviuſculi pendit? At nihilne intereſt ut de Deo et nobis ipſis recte ſentiamus? At nihilne intereſt, ut nobis innoteſcat, quam ob culpam in hunc mundum, veluti in carcerem Deus homines relegavit: Miſeriis innumeris obſitos, fœlicitatis veræ vix umbris relevatos? Hæc denique neſcientibus, fœlicitatem eorum futuram ecquæ argumenta nobis compertam facient? Si hic miſer ſim, et id unde fiat, neſcio; quo me ſciam non poſthac quoque miſerum futurum? Dubitationes iſtas curaſque ſollicitas, quibus tenetur quiſque cui ſua fœlicitas cordi eſt, Deus jam benignè diſſipavit; et formidinis loco ſpes novas ſuppeditavit. Verbum Dei, in quo reteguntur arcana, mundi ab origine primâ caliginoſi erroris

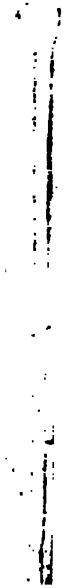
erroris nebulis obvoluta, in quo ſolo ſalus, in quo ſolo veritas deprehenditur, animo facili gratoque amplecti noſtrum eſt. Hoc duce uſa, vires novas ratio depromet; quæ ſi male faſtidioſa ducem ſequi dedignetur, in errorum turbine tumultuanti illico immergitur: quo fit, ut nihil feré adeo abſurdum inveniatur, quod non aliquis θεολογων noſtratum aſſeveravit.

E R R A T A.

P. 5. for *Stigmatiſes* read *and* Stigmatiſes
P. 21. for *that is* read *that it is*
P. 63. for τελυτωση read—τελευτωση
P. 204. for *Conditione prima*, read—Conditione, primâ
P. 206. for *eluceſſens* read *eluceſcens*
P. 214. for ωτελευτωση read τελευτωση
P. 219. for *affætaq;* read *effætaq;*

F I N I S.

P. 199, for *Ecclus* read *Eccles*—for *Ratiocinia* ——*invenerunt*, read *Inventa quæſiverunt.*



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